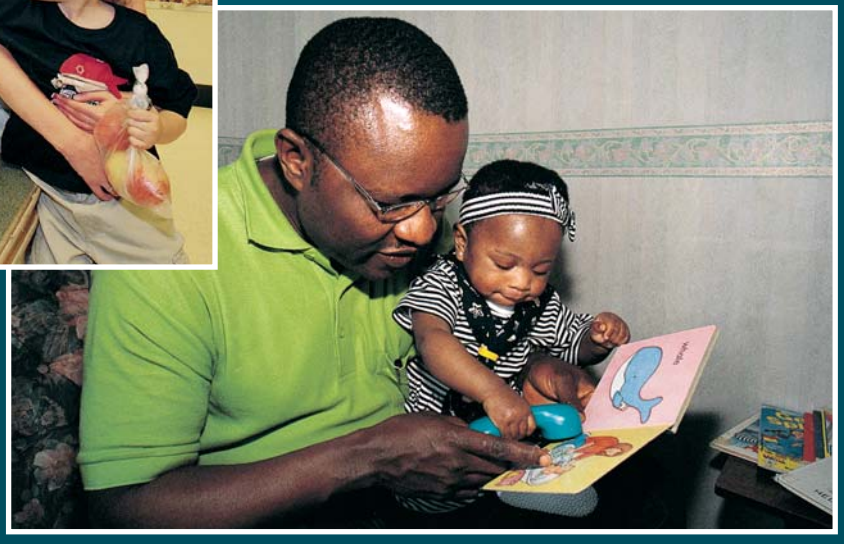
Working Together
Approaches to Family Literacy



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National Adult Literacy Agency

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Working Together

Approaches to Family Literacy

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Introduction

The vital role played by parents, grandparents and other care-givers in their children's education at all stages is gaining recognition. As a result, there is a growing need to support those parents who may wish to improve their own literacy skills and confidence in the context of family life and learning.

By encouraging both informal and formal learning and by giving support to learning at home, family literacy approaches can help the development of literacy and learning for all age groups.

Family literacy work can help to overcome the barriers to learning felt by some adults and children. It is an important way of recognising and building on the strengths of families and communities who feel marginalised or excluded from the expectations of school.

Family literacy work brings new learners into adult literacy and community education programmes and is a key element in developing lifelong learning opportunities for all.

This document provides an introduction to the concept of family literacy and guidelines for groups interested in family literacy work.

Part One defines key terms and explores the background and rationale for family literacy work.

Part Two describes some of the family literacy work taking place internationally and in Ireland.

Part Three offers guidelines for setting up and running family literacy programmes.

Part Four suggests recommendations and strategy for the development of family literacy work in Ireland.

Summary

Family Literacy

The term family literacy describes:

- the uses of literacy within family networks, especially activities which involve two or more generations;
- education programmes which help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context.

The family literacy approach:

- supports the learning that happens in the home and in communities;
- breaks down barriers between learning in different contexts;
- gives vital support to parents whose own education has been limited for various reasons;
- develops both children's and adults' literacy learning.

In this document the word 'family' describes a relationship of care and support between different generations, usually over a long period and the word 'parents' refers to adults who are in a long-term caring relationship with children and responsible for their well-being and development.

Recent studies show that the most important aspect of the parents' role in their children's learning is interest and involvement (Tuckett, 2004, 4). There is also increased understanding of the need to create and recognise learning opportunities at home and in the wider community.

Parents or care-givers whose own access to education was limited, for whatever reasons, may find support in relation to their children's learning especially helpful. Access to this support may encourage them to take part in further courses. The family literacy approach makes it possible for parents and carers to:

- understand and develop their role as their children's first educators;
- improve their own confidence and skills in literacy and numeracy;
- discover more about how children and adults learn.

National and international context

The concept of family literacy was introduced into the education debate in 1983, by the American writer and educator Denny Taylor. Taylor's research revealed the range and extent of literacy activity engaged in by young children at home with parents and recognised the importance of literacy activities in everyday life at home.

Various approaches to supporting family literacy have emerged around the world. Successful programmes are based on a response to the needs and concerns of the learners, adequate long-term funding and a commitment to strong partnership (Padak et al, 2002, 31).

In Ireland family literacy programmes have developed in conjunction with adult education, schools, libraries and community projects since the early 1990s. Courses vary according to the context and the learners involved.

Jeanne Paratore (2003) describes three types of family literacy programmes:

- *those that provide comprehensive services to parents and children;*
- *those that provide services to parents…with the intent of influencing the literacy achievement of both parents and children; and*
- *those that focus on affecting the literacy achievement of the child alone, with the parent as the instrument of change (13).*

This document is concerned with the first two of these three types of programme.

Principles

The following principles are recommended as a basis for the development of family literacy and numeracy programmes:

- The family is the first and primary educator of children and the home is the child's first and primary literacy resource.
- Family literacy work respects the difference between the various ways in which literacy and numeracy are developed and used within the home and in school.
- Family literacy work recognises that learning in families is a two-way process, as the adults in the family often learn from the children and young people.
- Family literacy programmes are developed through discussion with the participants. Listening to families is at the heart of the process.
- Family literacy work respects the right of families to protect their privacy and separateness.

Guidelines

The guidelines for setting up and running family literacy programmes include ideas, suggestions and practical information on aspects such as:

- getting started and building partnerships;
- programmes;
- recruiting participants;
- funding and key practical issues;
- evaluation.

Programmes are likely to fall into one of three categories:

A. Short 'outreach' courses for learners new to adult education.
B. Programmes which focus on specific skills, such as language, reading or using a computer.
C. 'Intensive' family literacy and numeracy programmes involving parents, carers and children.

"It's an eye-opener – a different way of education"

Partnership is a key feature of family literacy work and may require commitment to training to help the partnership to develop successfully.

Supportive and creative partnerships with local schools and pre-schools and with community development projects can be very effective. It is important that senior management personnel support the partnership approach.

> *"I never felt confident reading to my kids, but sure, some books don't even have words. We can both read to each other!"*

Recommendations and NALA strategy

The document recommends that the Department of Education and Science should take a lead role in promoting an integrated National Strategy for the development of family literacy.

This strategy should involve other key Government Departments: the Department of Health and Children, the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

There is a need for:

- a designated family literacy budget;
- training in family literacy approaches for staff from both adult literacy and school settings;
- research into home and school literacy development;
- the promotion of a partnership approach to family literacy work.

NALA is urged to include and promote family literacy in all aspects of its work.

Part One

Family Literacy and Adult Literacy

Part One

Family Literacy and Adult Literacy

Part One defines key terms and then explores the background and rationale for family literacy work as an aspect of education and lifelong learning.

1. Definitions

Literacy

NALA promotes a broad definition of the concept of literacy which involves the confident and varied application of skills in:

- listening and speaking;
- reading;
- writing;
- numeracy.

Literacy includes more than the technical skills of communication. It has personal, social and economic elements.

Literacy increases the opportunities for individuals and communities to reflect on experience, explore new possibilities and bring about change.

Increasingly literacy includes basic information and communication technology (ICT).

Adult literacy work

Good adult literacy work:

- starts with the needs and interests of the individual;
- involves personal and community development;
- includes building self esteem and confidence;
- aims to enable learners to reflect on personal and social issues;
- supports learners who wish to explore new possibilities.

Adult literacy provision also involves family literacy work.

Family

The word 'family' describes a relationship of care and support between different generations, usually over a long period.

Families include children and teenagers and the people who look after them:

- parents, foster parents, step-parents or guardians;
- grandparents;
- aunts and uncles;
- brothers, sisters and cousins.

Family networks can be large or small and may include wider communities.

Sometimes child-minders and residential care-workers fulfil roles similar to those of parents or guardians in relation to family learning.

In this document the term 'parents' will be used to mean the adults who are in a long-term caring relationship with children and responsible for their well-being and development.

Family Literacy

The term family literacy describes:

- the uses of literacy within a family or wider community, especially activities which involve two or more generations;
- education programmes which help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context.

Family literacy programmes

- support and develop the language, literacy and numeracy learning that happens in families;
- work with families where the adults are interested in the opportunity to develop their own basic education, as well as to help their children learn;
- build on literacy practices within families or communities;
- aim to develop literacy skills and confidence across generations.

Throughout this document the term 'family literacy' includes numeracy.

2. Family literacy work: background and rationale

How the family literacy idea developed

The concept of family literacy was introduced into the education debate in 1983, by the American writer and educator Denny Taylor. Taylor's research, described in her book *Family Literacy: Young Children Learning to Read and Write*, revealed the range and extent of literacy activity engaged in by young children at home with parents and recognised the importance of literacy activities in everyday life at home.

Her work coincided with developments in research about the education of children which increasingly recognised the role of the home in children's success in learning to read and write (Hannon, 1995, 23). During the 1980s the emphasis moved from including parents in school activities, to recognising and supporting the role of parents, or other adult carers, as children's first educators (Hannon, 1995, 25).

Another important development was the idea of 'emergent literacy', introduced by E. Sulzby in 1985 and explored by Nigel Hall in his book *The Emergence of Literacy* (1987). This recognised that developing literacy is a gradual process which builds on a range of reading, writing, and language experiences from a very young age. The understanding of literacy as a process includes the importance of informal learning activities at home.

Peter Hannon has conducted extensive research into the role of the home in the development of reading. In his book *Literacy, Home and School* (1995) Hannon notes that "if [parents] cannot read themselves, they may still be able to help by encouraging their children, talking about stories, responding to the sense of what children read, and providing opportunities for children's reading to develop" (36). He describes the 'ORIM' framework for working with parents based on their role in: Opportunities for learning; Recognition of the child's achievements; Interaction around literacy activities; Models of literacy (Hannon, 1995, 51).

The term 'family literacy' is now broadly used to describe:

- the many literacy activities which involve more than one generation;
- adult education projects which focus on parents and carers;
- school-based projects which involve parents in supporting their children's school education.

While the concept of family literacy developed first in relation to children's learning, the two-way effect has also been recognised. Another American researcher, Vivian Gadsden, suggests that more attention needs to be given to the impact of family literacy programmes on the adults involved, and the position of family literacy work in adult education (Gadsden, 2002, 253).

Family literacy work has become a major element in many literacy development programmes. Taylor returned to the issue in the mid 1990s in the publication *Many Families, Many Literacies* (1997), which addresses the need to listen to families and communities rather than impose models which may be unsuitable or unattractive to families in particular areas.

Family involvement and children's learning

Research continues to support evidence collected over a long period on the importance of the family in relation to children's learning at all ages. In particular, recent studies show that what matters most is parents' interest and involvement in their children's learning. This is a key point for family literacy programmes, as parents who are not confident in their own reading and writing learn the key role they play in their children's learning.

> *"I never felt confident reading to my kids, but sure some books don't even have words. We can both read to each other."*

Skills for Families (The Basic Skills Agency, 2003) notes that "Research on pre-school education… concludes that 'the quality of the home learning environment is more important than social class and levels of [parents'] education'" (3). Feinstein and Symons "found that the effect of parental involvement in a child's learning is eight times greater than the impact of other elements such as social class or parents' occupations on children's achievements" (Tuckett, 2004, 4). Charles Deforges' work (2003) has shown that parental engagement can account for up to 12% of the difference between outcomes for pupils (The Basic Skills Agency, 2003, 3).

The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) *Learners for Life* and *Knowledge and Skills for Life* reports (2000) analyse a study of fifteen year-olds still in full-time education.

The reports note that:

- family and socio-economic background clearly affected educational achievement;
- this effect is particularly linked to "differences in approaches to learning: less advantaged students are not just less well-motivated and less in control of their abilities, but also are weaker on two powerful learning strategies, 'control' and 'elaboration'" (OECD, 2000a, 18);
- "weaker readers also tend to have weaker characteristics as learners – but not in the case of … co-operative learning, which is potentially a context in which their competencies can be improved" (OECD, 2000a, 18).

This analysis indicates that working with families is likely to benefit young people's capacity to learn in school and afterwards.

The PISA study also found that, "Parents' education and quality of communication with children show a positive association with school performance" (OECD, 2000b, Chapter 6, 2).

The findings of the PISA study indicate that the attention given in family literacy work to ways of learning and 'learning to learn' is particularly important.

Addressing Disadvantage (Archer and Weir, 2004), a Draft Summary Report from The Educational Research Centre, Dublin, to the Committee on Educational Disadvantage, notes, "there is now a multi-faceted approach to tackling disadvantage" (3). Such an approach needs to include "a high degree of parental involvement in the educational process (both in their own homes and in schools)" (3). The authors observe that "attempts to focus on the inter-generational nature of educational disadvantage" are worth noting, including "family literacy programmes" (10).

Three types of family literacy programmes

Jeanne Paratore (2003) describes three types of family literacy programmes:

- *those that provide comprehensive services to parents and children;*
- *those that provide services to parents…with the intent of influencing the literacy achievement of both parents and children; and*
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This document is concerned with the first two of these three types of programme.

NALA and family literacy

Focus on adult learners

NALA's focus on family literacy is from the perspective of the adult learner. In the context of its mission statement: "To ensure that all adults with literacy difficulties have access to a range of high quality learning opportunities", NALA's aim is:

- to facilitate and support groups wishing to develop programmes for adult learners which recognise and support their key role as family members.

In learning about and gaining skills to assist in their role as the first and primary educators of their children, parents and other care-givers in the family are developing and educating themselves.

Family literacy work:

- is an important outreach programme in adult literacy work;
- provides support for and validation of the key role of all parents and carers in the education of their children;
- engages new learners in long-term literacy development.

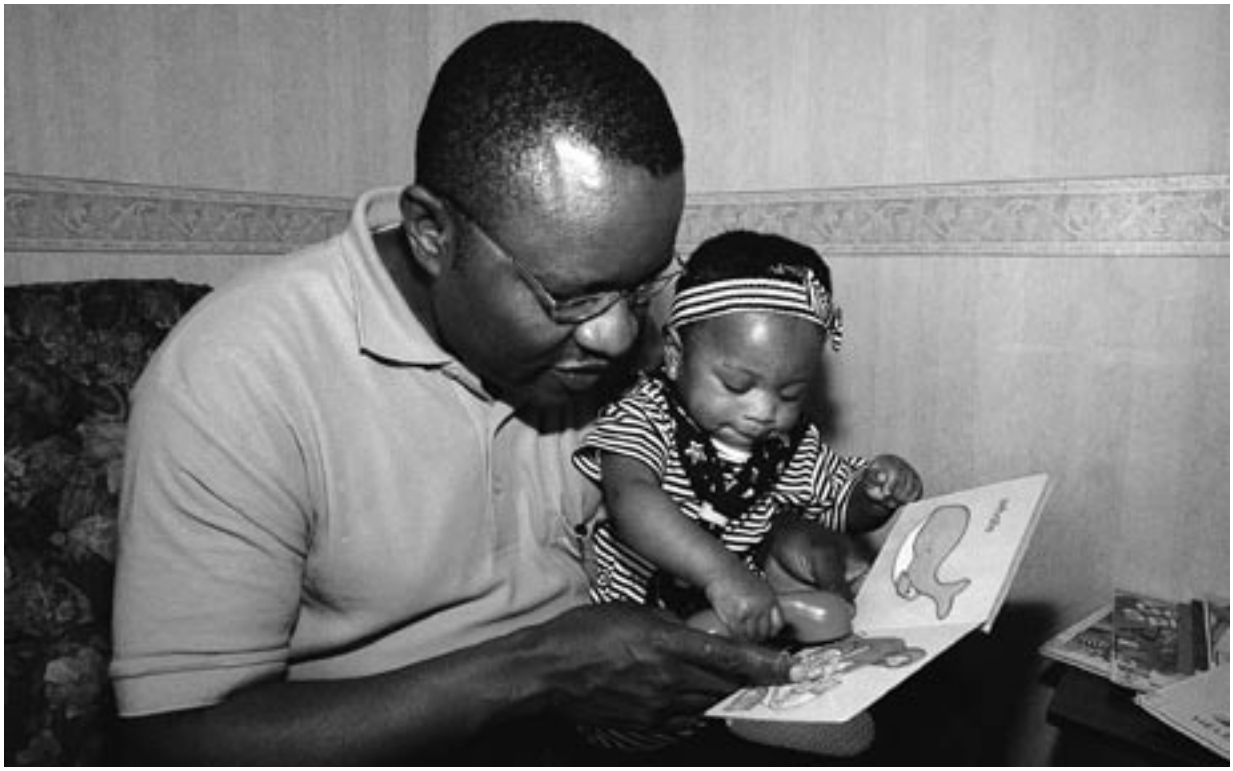
"Discussion with others can help answer some questions which sometimes seem impossible"

Family literacy brings adults back to learning

Adult learners are motivated to improve their literacy skills for many reasons, including personal development or the demands of their job. Sometimes adults choose to return to education themselves in order to improve their own level of literacy or numeracy so that they can help the children in their lives. It is therefore important to design programmes that respond to this need.

Understanding how children learn gives important support to parents who are not confident in their ability to help their children. At the same time, becoming involved in their childrens' learning can help the adult's own literacy and numeracy. They can learn alongside their children, as long as they are supported as adult learners and are encouraged to realise that they have a key role in their children's learning, even if they are working on the same skills.

Parents and carers are often motivated because they realise that their children and young people will learn best if their learning is well supported at home both before



and after they start school. Sometimes parents wish to give their children the help they know they needed themselves when they were at school. They are keen to give their children a better chance than they had. Parents of pre-school children often wish to understand more about how children learn at this stage and how they can be helped.

In the adult learning context family literacy programmes aim to involve parents, guardians, carers and other family members who wish to develop their own literacy and learn how to engage in and provide enriching literacy experiences in the home and in communities.

The UK Learning and Skills Council (2003) notes that another aim is "to reduce the number of adults who have difficulty with literacy by building on the motivation that comes from helping their children" (4). In some places family programmes have proved particularly effective in "reaching socially and educationally excluded parents" (The Basic Skills Agency, 2003, 3).

> *"I feel good now when I do something with the children.*
> *I take more notice of what I'm doing, both good and bad"*

The benefits of family literacy programmes for adult learners

Current research in the UK by the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) into the benefits of family learning for the adults involved reveals:

- greater confidence and self-esteem;
- progress in learning;
- increased entry to employment (Tuckett, 2004, 6).

For the adult participants, the benefits of engaging in family literacy programmes include:

- increased self-confidence;
- improvement in literacy and numeracy skills;
- increased awareness of the relevance and value of literacy experiences at home and in the community;
- learning skills and developing confidence in reading to children and choosing books;
- increased confidence in the role and skills of parenting and caring for children and young people;
- learning the skills and benefits of engaging in informal and formal learning activities with children and young people in their families and communities;
- greater knowledge and confidence in relating to schools and teachers;
- greater knowledge and understanding of the school curriculum;
- personal and community development opportunities through sharing ideas and making connections with other learners;
- gaining a certificate;
- greater awareness of and access to further learning, training and employment opportunities.

In this context, family literacy work becomes a key element of an overall educational strategy especially for the literacy development of all age groups and an integral feature of comprehensive adult literacy provision.

Home literacy and school literacy

A key feature of an adult education approach to family literacy work is the recognition that literacy is a broader concept than the needs and demands of school-work.

The literacy learned at home and in local communities is rich in the use of local language and the expression of the experience and history of families, communities and cultures.

Home literacy activities include:

- passing on family stories;
- playing games;
- weighing and measuring;
- making notes or lists;
- giving written or spoken instructions on how to do something;
- telling jokes;
- sending greetings cards;
- noting appointments on a calendar;
- explaining a point of view;
- scanning the TV guide;
- family finance; pocket money, bus fares, shopping.

Sometimes the literacy demands of school do not build on the child's experience of literacy at home and this can cause difficulties for both parents and child (Cairney, 1998, 3,7, 28 – 29). Family literacy work can help to bridge this gap. The family literacy approach validates home-based learning. It can help families and schools to understand that the literacy learned at home and the demands of school are sometimes different but are equally important. It can make it possible for both parents and teachers to recognise and build the range of literacies available to learners.

Building on the strengths of home literacy

Family literacy programmes in the adult literacy context are based on a strengths or 'wealth' model of family literacy. Programmes based on this model will reflect the literacy learning that already exists at home and aim to validate, support and develop the work that parents already do (Auerbach, 1997, 71 – 81; Tett, 2000, 123 – 127; Mashishi and Cook, 2003, 229 – 231).

This is in contrast to an approach that assumes that families cannot be relied on to provide learning opportunities and that parents with little positive experience of education themselves need to be taught how to help their children learn.

> *"If I feel there is something wrong now, I feel I am able to go in to school and ask to see the teacher"*

Family literacy as an integrated approach

Family literacy also describes an approach and an awareness of learners in a family and community context. The concept of family literacy therefore affects all adult literacy work, and also teachers' work with children in schools. It can inform one-to-one adult literacy tuition as well as group programmes. It can be an important element in literacy work with young people in training programmes and an aspect of workplace education.

Who are family literacy programmes for?

Many family literacy programmes focus on families with very young children, at the pre-school stage or in the early years of primary school. However, the later years are also important and challenging to parents, carers and other key family members.

As children are given increasingly difficult homework, parents and carers themselves often need help in order to support the young learners. Each stage of transition also needs support and understanding, especially the change from primary to secondary education, and the examination years. Family literacy work can provide important validation and knowledge relevant to these transition points. "Issues of teenage literacies are no less important than those concerning young children" (Barton, 1997, 106).

At present most family literacy provision involves mothers or other women caring for children. The very positive aspect of this is that family literacy programmes

effectively operate as access programmes for women (Brooks et al, 1996, xii, xiv). Internationally, in countries where women's literacy is a major issue, family literacy projects involve women as learners in a way that other literacy initiatives have failed to do (UNESCO, 1995, 50,59,84).

However, family programmes also need to acknowledge and validate the important role men play in family learning. Research in America in the 1990s into the role of parents in children's learning found that mothers and fathers who believe in their role as primary educators equip their children to learn in different ways. Mothers are particularly important in teaching their children how to learn, while the fathers are likely to develop their problem-solving skills and the ability to work towards a goal. But the key point was that the parents saw themselves as educators of their children (Henry, 2003, 9).

The Department of Education and Science White Paper *Learning for Life* particularly highlights the need to encourage "disadvantaged, hard-to-reach men" to take up learning opportunities (17). There is specific concern at present about boys' literacy and general educational development and an increasing awareness of the impact of gender differences on learning styles, experiences and outcomes (NCCA, 2003; Shiel et al, 2001; Smyth, 1999). Family literacy is potentially a very effective way of actively involving adults and children in new approaches to learning.

'Family literacy' and 'family learning': what's the difference?

Learning happens in all families, informally, at home and in the wider community.

The introduction of compulsory school education resulted in great benefit to individuals and to society, but reliance on schooling changed the original central role of families and communities in the area of learning.

Now, however, increased access to technology, the development of distance learning and the emphasis on learning as a lifelong experience mean that there is interest again in families and communities as important places of learning and education.

Family learning programmes aim to:

- support and encourage the family and community as places where people can learn together, acting as both teacher and learner;
- connect adults back into education.

Family learning clearly includes family literacy, but in this document we are making a distinction between wider family learning programmes and more specific family literacy work.

Summary

Family literacy work relates to many aspects of education and lifelong learning. It is an important support for informal learning in families and communities. It also helps to create vital links between informal and formal learning environments, which benefit adults and children of all ages.

Part Two

Family Literacy Work

Part Two

Family Literacy Work

Part Two describes some of the family literacy work taking place internationally and in Ireland.

1. International context

Family literacy as a specific educational strategy developed first in the USA, although many other countries introduced 'parental involvement' programmes from the 1970s on (Benseman, 2002, 2).

The following description outlines the ways in which family literacy work has developed in various parts of the world. It is not intended as a comprehensive review but presents snapshots of a variety of different programmes.

North America

USA

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) in Kentucky promotes a model developed by the Kenan Trust. This arose out of Parent and Child Education (PACE) programmes piloted in 1986.

The Kenan model recommends that family literacy programmes should contain four core elements:

- Adult Education: this is a basic education component designed for the adult participants;
- Children's Education;
- Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time;
- Parent Time: focusing on parenting issues, skills and support systems.

Parents taking part in this programme attend classes three days a week for a period of a year and are required to become involved in their children's schools as part of the course.

This model is the basis of the definition of 'family literacy services' in a range of Education Acts in the US, especially the national 'Even Start' programme which was introduced in1989 to provide a range of family education services. Key features of programmes based on this model are their length and intensity. These aspects are central to the effectiveness of the model (Benseman, 2002, 4, 8), together with the provision of adequate funding for all elements of the programme, including partnership working.

The Kenan model and the work of the National Center for Family Literacy have influenced the development of approaches to family literacy throughout the world. However, a number of family literacy tutors and researchers in the US challenge the popularity of the Kenan model and query in particular the decision to apply one model to a wide range of contexts (Taylor [ed], 1997, 78-79, 84-86). Andrea DeBruin-Parecki and Barbara Krol-Sinclair (2003) note that, "The adoption of the Kenan Trust model by the US government in its extensive funding of family literacy under Even Start has necessarily limited the extent to which other approaches to family literacy are sustained and valued" (304).

Canada

Canada has avoided promoting a single model of family literacy and only 2% of the 300 Canadian progammes listed in the National Adult Literacy Database follow the Kenan model (Debruin-Parecki and Krol-Sinclair, 2003, 304).

In British Columbia family literacy programmes vary according to the communities within which they are based. *The BC Framework of Statements and Standards of Best Practices in Family Literacy* (Rasmussen, 1999) emphasises the need for a range of family literacy provision and the central importance of partnership and participation.

Example

The PRINTS (Parents' Roles Interacting with Teacher Support) programme is a 12-week course for parents and carers of pre-school children. Many of the PRINTS projects are based in quite isolated parts of Canada, including Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, variety and flexibility are emphasised in applying the model, which "focuses on integrating activities into family life and encourages learning as fun. A core aim is to enable the adult learners to understand their central role in literacy development at home" (Fagan, 2000, 26).

Europe

England and Wales

In England and Wales the Basic Skills Agency supports a range of family literacy initiatives funded through the Learning and Skills Council. There has been particular emphasis on the success of an intensive model for Family Language, Literacy and Numeracy (FLLN) courses based on an intergenerational approach. The model has "the triple aim of

- improving parents' own literacy skills;
- improving parents' ability to help their children with the early stages of learning to read and write;
- boosting young children's acquisition of reading and writing" (Brooks *et al,* 1996, 2).

This model was introduced in a pilot programme in 1993. It provides between 72 and 96 hours of tuition over a period of 12 weeks and involves parents and their children up to the age of 6. Parents and children attend both separate and joint learning sessions staffed by adult literacy and early childhood education tutors. Parents' sessions include the opportunity to work on their own literacy and gain nationally recognised accreditation. Children benefit from quality early childhood education with experienced teachers. In the joint session the parents try out learning activities with their children which they prepare in their own learning sessions, supported by both the early childhood teachers and the adult literacy tutors.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) evaluation of this programme found considerable educational benefits to both children and parents. The report also noted that the adults experienced a notable increase in confidence, became more involved in their children's schooling and were often motivated to attend other relevant education programmes (Brooks et al, 1996, xiv, 79-80).

In 2003 the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) carried out an evaluation of the family programmes funded by the Learning and Skills Council. The evaluation discovered that many adults who might be interested in family literacy were unable or unwilling to attend the intensive courses (NIACE, 2003, 55). Their report therefore recommends that a wider range of programmes should be introduced, allowing for a "variety of course lengths and models and more locally responsive provision" (NIACE, 2003, ii).

The 2003 – 2004 *Skills for Families* initiative requires that participating partnerships should offer four delivery models (The Basic Skills Agency, 2003, 6). In addition to

the intensive Family Language, Literacy and Numeracy model, there are shorter programmes such as: 'Playing with Language' for parents and their pre-school children; distance education courses for childminders; community-based family programmes and 'family finance' courses. The *Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy Guide for Policy Makers* (Department for Education and Skills, 2004) outlines a range of 17 Learning and Skills Council funded delivery models for 2004 – 2005, including taster courses, 'introductory', 'short' and 'intensive' programmes.

Scotland

In Scotland the concept of a range of literacies forms the basis of adult and family literacy work in community education and development contexts.

Lyn Tett (2003a) describes how many family literacy projects in Scotland have enabled the adult learners to develop confidence and literacy skills through a critical study of the uses of literacy at home, at school and in their community. "Family literacy policy in Scotland is designed to 'access learners' ability to apply their learning to real contexts and to measure the economic, personal and social gains that they make, including their willingness to learn in the future' (Scottish Executive, 2001:14)" (Tett, 2003a),10).

Malta

In Malta there is considerable interest in a family literacy project involving parents whose children face particular difficulties in school, especially in relation to learning to read. The 'Klabb Hilti' programme is run by the Institute for Child and Parent Learning Support within the Foundation for Educational Services. The involvement of the parents is seen as a positive way of helping the children remain within the school system as well as developing parents' skills in working with their children. While the programme involves an element of adult education, the aims relate specifically to the children's educational needs, rather than those of the adults. The school teachers involved are required to undertake 100 hours of training to work with the parents (Foundation for Educational Services report, 2004).

South Africa

Soweto

In the township of Soweto, Cape Town, the Families Learning Together Project (2000) developed out of Parents and Schools Learning Clubs, initiated in 1990 by local parents who wished to address underachievement among young people in the community. They, and the teachers who became involved, understood that it was vital to assert the culture, language and values of the home community if the young people were to improve their educational opportunities (Mashishi and Cook, 232).

The project aims "to promote literacy and learning in communities by involving family members in literacy and development activities that utilise skills, values, knowledge(s) and attitudes that reside in families" and "to develop learning communities that are able to contribute to the social, economic and political development of society" (Mashishi and Cook, 230).

Workshops where a wide variety of adult family members explore ways of working with their children are central to the work of the project. Topics include story reading and writing; using family histories to teach writing and research skills; learning about the work children do in school. Joint activities with children include developing links with local libraries or connecting home and school knowledge through activities such as cooking (Mashishi and Cook, 237 –238).

Australia

In Australia the school-based Talk To A Literacy Learner (TTAL) programme focuses on parental involvement in the literacy development of children. It was initiated in 1990 as part of International Literacy Year activities and is now in use in over 400 schools. The programme involves 16 two-hour workshops on topics related to literacy and learning and the role of parents.

Recent developments in this and related programmes reinforce the importance of home and community literacies, as well as creating partnership with parents in teaching school literacy (Cairney, 2002, 9).

New Zealand

A pilot project is currently running in Manukau City, Auckland, to explore the effectiveness of an adapted form of the Kenan model of family literacy work in the New Zealand context.

In his first evaluation report on the project John Benseman (2002) notes that various programmes in New Zealand have used the term family literacy and there are also several programmes which aim to involve parents in their children's reading development. However, few projects have adopted the four key elements or the "instructional intensity" of the Kenan model (2).

The Manukau Family Literacy model is therefore an interesting development. Initial qualitative findings emphasise the need for effective partnership between school, kindergarten and adult education. Time for shared development and planning for staff from both the school and the adult education context is a particularly significant factor.

UNESCO

The report of the UNESCO World Symposium on Family Literacy (1995) emphasises that programmes should respond to local interest and need, and build on the strengths of families and communities:

"Programmes are usually small in scale and are designed in consultation with potential participants to meet specific needs and address common problems" (12).

"Family Literacy is, above all else, a means for placing education at the service of families. The precise manner in which this can best be achieved may be expected to vary significantly" (53).

Summary

The key point about family literacy programmes that emerges from international snapshots is their basis in local communities. Courses which are based on very specific models need to develop ways of responding to local strengths and needs if they are to be effective. Family literacy tutors aim to develop links between the way children and adults learn at home and the different demands of school learning. The home is validated as a place of learning in itself, not just as an adjunct to school learning.

The other key point is the importance of stable, long-term funding that facilitates working with different age groups. The countries with the most wide reaching family literacy provision designate funding specifically for this area of work and have structures to support programmes which cross traditional boundaries in education.

2. The context in Ireland

The development of family literacy work in adult education settings

In Ireland family literacy programmes have been developed in various settings in conjunction with adult education, schools, libraries and community projects. Many of the programmes involve these groups working in partnership. Adult education contexts include:

- local VEC adult literacy services;
- adult education centres;
- Youthreach and Community Training Centres;
- Travellers' centres;
- community education and development groups
- family centres;
- prisons
- support programmes with homeless families;
- ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) projects.

Most courses at present focus on working with parents and carers, to encourage them to discover and understand their importance as their children's first teachers and to develop their own literacy and numeracy skills.

Many are funded through Department of Education and Science (DES) allocations to local Vocational Education Committees (VECs). Projects also draw funding from the training body FAS, Area Based Partnerships and Local Community Groups, the library service, Barnardos and the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

The White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life* (DES, 2000), includes family literacy work as an aspect of adult literacy provision. The section on "Future Priorities in Adult Literacy Provision" notes the "intergenerational impact" of literacy difficulties and recommends the development of "new modes of targeting those affected" (88). A later section further notes that, "The [National Reading] Initiative will work closely with the adult literacy service, where family literacy programmes, involving parents and their children, are being expanded across the country" (92).

The development of family literacy projects in the context of adult basic education in Ireland is reviewed below.

The Clare Family Learning Project

In 1994 the Co Clare VEC (Vocational Education Committee) Reading and Writing Scheme received a grant from the International Year of the Family to pilot a course in family literacy in response to local interest. The course focused on how children and adults learn and the importance of the home in early learning. In 1996 EU funding made it possible to develop the programmes and to provide creche facilities, together with a pre-school room where children and adults could learn together. In 1998 the project received a further grant from the Texas-based Dubuis foundation which enabled it to produce a *Family Learning Resource Pack* (2000). In collaboration with Breacadh, an Irish language version of the pack was published in 2002.

The pack includes a *Family Learning Resource Guide,* a set of workbooks for parents and a 'Photopak', with a range of colour photos showing many kinds of learning activities that happen in families. The *Resource Guide* outlines in detail fourteen sessions which "contain the basic conceptual framework for a programme designed to help parents maximise the potential of the home learning environment for literacy and numeracy development" (20).

The core sessions do not include wider parenting or family issues, though the introduction notes that topics such as money management, health and nutrition and first aid may be covered if raised by the group.

The sessions provide a framework for a possible 28 to 30 hour course to include topics such as:

- parents are natural teachers;
- the importance of talking and listening;
- rhymes, songs and poems;
- storytelling, sharing books, making a book;
- everyday writing;
- print is all around us;
- maths in action;
- making connections: exploring the links between oral language, reading, writing and maths in everyday living and the home as a positive learning environment;
- opportunities for further involvement in adult learning.

The parents' workbooks contain 'home activities' as well as practical information and ideas for supporting learning in the home. They were devised as an alternative to the joint parent and child sessions promoted in some family literacy models. The photographs in the 'Photopak' are used to stimulate discussion and to raise awareness of the opportunities for literacy and numeracy learning in everyday activities.

Since the pack's publication, the project has been providing facilitator training which has been very important for the development of family literacy projects in other counties. The Clare project emphasises that a continuing process of consultation and collaboration is central to the work and facilitators are advised to use the resource pack flexibly as they plan and develop family learning programmes appropriate to local needs. The *Resource Guide* includes ideas on its use and development in a local context, highlighting the importance of an adult education approach (23).

Courses in Early Reading Support

This kind of programme focuses on building confidence, skills and understanding to help parents and other carers to read with their babies and young children. The **'Read to Succeed'** course was introduced in 1997 at the Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC) in response to interest expressed by a group of women attending classes at the Centre. It is based on the programme 'Reading to Children: Theory and Practice' developed by the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (BIFHE) and is accredited by the Northern Ireland Open College Network (NIOCN). Tutors for the course received training under the BIFHE 'Extending Family Literacy' programme.

The full 'Read to Succeed' course extends for 39 hours, over a period of 12 to 13 weeks. It includes topics such as:

- foetal stimulation;
- emergent reading skills;
- genres of children's literature;
- the reading process and 'props';
- language development;
- the school system.

Learners on this course prepare a portfolio and demonstrate the ability to read aloud to a group of children.

In 2000-2001 the Department of Education and Science National Reading Initiative sponsored a tutor-training programme, organised by the Education Co-ordinators with the Local Area Partnerships, and run by the Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education at several venues around the country. Following this the Education Co-ordinators commissioned locally-developed NCVA (National Council for Vocational Awards) modules in 'Early Reading Support', based on the content and approach of 'Read to Succeed'. These modules are available nationally (see Appendix 3).

Some adult literacy centres run short courses on reading with young children using titles such as 'What's the Story' or 'Reading for Fun'. These usually run for six to eight weeks and incorporate many of the same topics as the 'Read to Succeed' course but in less depth and with no requirement for practical demonstrations of reading or portfolio preparation.

"I'm using the library now"

Programmes focusing on child development and parenting

In the early 1990s, the Adult Literacy Service run by Co. Offaly VEC initiated a family learning course in response to interest from parents attending adult literacy tuition. In particular, parents were looking for ideas and guidance on how to help their children's school learning. The course was based on the Parent Involvement Programme developed by the Education Research Centre in St. Patrick's College, Dublin (1990). The initial course focused on aspects of home life and behaviour that influence the child's ability to learn. Over time this course was adapted to suit the needs and interests of various groups of learners, with a particular emphasis on groups of parents or carers who also wished to work on their own literacy.

The programme combines elements specific to the topic of 'learning' with aspects of 'parenting' which particularly relate to learning, and includes units on nutrition and behaviour, as well as topics such as emergent literacy, reading to small children, print in the everyday world ('environmental print') and homework support. It focuses on the development of the child and the parents' role in this.

During the late 1990s the family learning tutor involved in this programme ran a number of training sessions for adult literacy tutors and organisers from other counties and several adult literacy schemes adopted the core programme. In particular the Co. Kildare **'Parents and Children Working Together'** course run by the adult literacy service in the Athy/Kildare town area follows this programme.

Co. Dublin VEC Framework for Family Literacy

In 2003 the adult literacy service run by Co. Dublin VEC (Vocational Education Committee) published *The Story So Far... Report* and *Staff Handbook on Family Learning.* The *Handbook* outlines core elements for two stages of family literacy work (19 – 21).

Stage One is planned for 12 hours over a period of 6 weeks and focuses on general introduction to family literacy concepts such as:

- parents are teachers;
- learning together;
- comprehension and story-telling;
- choosing books;
- linking with schools.

Stage Two can become a longer and more extensive programme and may include aspects of parenting, together with sessions on play and development, language, making a book, and maths. A 'Creating Together' topic includes the possibility of joint sessions with children combining literacy development and practical activities such as cookery, art or music.

The programmes are based mainly on oral work and discussion with parents and carers. This is essentially an outreach approach, based on the view that family learning is an important way of "widening participation and improving access for 'hard-to-reach' learners" (*The Story So Far…Report,* 2003, 19).

Other approaches to family literacy programmes as part of adult literacy work

- Several adult literacy schemes run courses that help parents support their children's learning at school at both first and second level. Some enable parents who are not confident about their own reading to take part in paired reading programmes run by their children's schools. Adults and children can be helped best when the schools and adult literacy service are able to develop a co-operative approach to the benefit of the whole family.
- Courses which are linked to learning to use computers have proved a good way of motivating adults and children to become involved in family literacy. General introductions to keyboard skills, the use of the mouse and, in particular, the internet and email have formed the basis of a number of successful courses. This is a particularly popular model for projects focusing on work with fathers, or other male carers, and boys.
- A family literacy approach to homework clubs may include separate sessions for parents and carers, focusing on both education for themselves and guidance in ways of supporting their children. The adults, children or young people may then attend a centre together to complete the homework,

supported by tutors with either an adult education or a school-teaching background.

- Family literacy projects in prisons often begin with discussion of literacy and communication in a family setting and develop towards encouraging parents either to tape stories for their children or to practise reading stories which they can read to their children during a visit (Prison Education Service, 2004, 28).
- In several areas adult literacy centres, primary schools and libraries have liaised in running storytelling sessions involving families new to Ireland. Some libraries have also run programmes which focus on encouraging boys and their fathers or other male carers to learn through a shared interest in books about particular topics, such as sport.
- Practical and creative activities such as cooking, art and craft, drama or video production, with related literacy and numeracy learning, can be an effective and enjoyable way of involving both adults and children. This approach reflects the multiple intelligences philosophy of education. It is a feature of summer projects run by adult learning centres, community development and family support centres and is also proving effective as outreach work, as well as part of regular adult basic education provision in some areas.
- Family literacy projects involving Traveller families include: outreach courses with parents based in halting sites; training as part of Community Employment schemes or Senior Travellers' Training Centres; and partnership work in conjunction with School Completion Programmes.
- Some adult literacy centres have developed programmes based on the value of props in telling stories to young children. The 'storysacks' idea was initiated in the UK in the mid-1990s under the Basic Skills Agency's programme of small grants for family literacy developments (Poulson *et al* 1997, 99-101). The props are kept in a sack which also contains a tape, a non-fiction book, a game and suggestions for follow-up activities. The combination of practical work in making the sacks and support materials, together with discussion of the importance of books and reading with young children, has proved particularly successful with some groups.

Training for family literacy work

Training for tutors new to family literacy work has been provided, as described above, by the Co. Clare Family Learning Project, the Co. Offaly Family Learning Programme

and the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (BIFHE). NALA has run a number of workshops at national level on aspects of family literacy.

As part of the accredited programme of training for adult literacy tutors and organisers, NALA and the Literacy Development Centre at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) offer modules in family literacy at both National Certificate and National Diploma level.

Family literacy and the wider educational context

The Department of Education and Science (DES) is responsible for a number of initiatives aimed at reducing educational disadvantage, which are particularly relevant to the development of family literacy work. These may provide an important potential means of developing partnership and collaboration arrangements for family literacy work in local areas.

Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)

This programme was set up in 1990 and is currently running in 278 primary schools and 188 schools at second level, based in areas "with high concentrations of pupils with characteristics that are associated with educational disadvantage and early school leaving" (DES website, 13/6/03). HSCL Co-ordinators develop courses and programmes with parents and liaise with local communities.

The HSCL scheme is "a preventative strategy targeted at pupils who are at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system" and is "concerned with establishing partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning" (DES website, 13/6/03). The scheme "seeks to develop the parent as prime educator" and places particular emphasis on the effectiveness of partnership between home and school based on principles of equality (Conaty, 2002, 70, 71).

This programme is a particularly important point of connection for family literacy work in local areas. The HSCL co-ordinators have vital links with families and because their role specifically connects school and home their work is clearly related to the aims of family literacy projects. Partnership working with the HSCL scheme can be a useful and productive starting point.

Committee on Educational Disadvantage

This committee was set up "to advise the Minister on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage" (DES website, 22/3/04). It was launched by the Minister for Education in March 2002 and its work is also informed by a larger forum on educational disadvantage which draws in a wider range of bodies and agencies concerned with social inclusion.

The Committee's submission on *Priority Areas for Action Within the Adult and Community Education Sector* (2004) emphasises the importance of partnership in the development of family literacy work and calls on the Minister for Education to establish a dedicated budget for family literacy work.

Early Start Pre-School Pilot Project

This is a pre-school programme currently running in 40 schools in designated areas of educational disadvantage. An important feature is that an element of the grant for the Early Start programme is set aside for developing parental involvement. In many areas family literacy programmes would provide the kind of support that the project organisers wish to develop with parents.

Centre for Educational Disadvantage

Based in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra in Dublin, this Centre co-ordinates training and the development of programmes relating to educational disadvantage. In 2002 the Centre organised a National Forum on Primary Education. The report from this forum highlights the importance of an integrated approach to education in areas of disadvantage (Centre for Educational Disadvantage, 2002, 153 - 4, 160), the vital role of parents and guardians in their children's education (162) and the need to broaden initial and in-service teacher training (156,168). Family literacy work, based on partnership between schools and adult literacy projects, can give support and confidence to parents in fulfilling their role as primary educators as well as developing their own education.

School Completion Programme

This is "a key component of the Department's strategy to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of or are experiencing educational disadvantage" (DES website, 18/4/04). The programme involves collaboration between designated schools and other agencies. Local management committees are

responsible for planning approaches that will support all school pupils to enter and complete second level.

This again offers a collaborative structure through which family literacy work can be developed. The family literacy approach is very relevant to this programme because it offers support to families in their educational role, helps families to understand the learning process and the school system and offers parents the opportunity to work on their own literacy skills.

Towards a Framework for Early Learning

This consultative document (2004) from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) includes two aims which highlight both the key role of parental involvement in early learning and the importance of supporting parents in this role.

The *Framework for Early Learning* will aim to:

- *"emphasise the important and influential role of parents/guardians as their children's primary educators during early childhood;*
- *guide parents/guardians, childminders and practitioners in planning and providing appropriate learning opportunities for all children" (Executive Summary, 7).*

In this context, family literacy work is again vital to provide support for many families where literacy is an issue for the adults.

Summary

Family literacy work in Ireland takes place in a range of different contexts and settings. Courses in the adult literacy context are often short-term, as they are seen as a way of contacting new learners. In some areas adult education, schools and community-based programmes have established effective partnerships, while in other places this has proved difficult. Programmes are flexible and based strongly in an adult education approach to working with parents. There is interest in developing family literacy work, but funding has proved a problem in some areas.

At present there are several initiatives from the Department of Education and Science which would connect well with a family literacy approach. Recognising and building the learning that happens in families supports the development of lifelong education based in communities, drawing on partnership between local people and local structures.

Part Three

Guidelines for the Development of Family Literacy Work in an Adult Education Context

Part Three

Guidelines for the Development of Family Literacy Work in an Adult Education Context

Introduction

Part Three suggests guidelines for family literacy work under the following headings:

1. Principles
2. Getting started
3. Needs analysis
4. Aims and objectives
5. Programmes
6. Tutors and training
7. Recruiting participants
8. Funding
9. Practical issues
10. Evaluation

The guidelines are intended to support local projects wishing to develop family literacy work in their area. They outline basic principles for family literacy work and indicate the kinds of aims and objectives that local projects may formulate. They describe the range of programmes that may be useful and emphasise the importance of training for the tutors. The role of evaluation as a way of developing and improving provision is also described.

The guidelines explore ways of building partnerships and examine important practical details such as good premises and childcare support. The section on recruiting participants suggests ways of contacting learners. Reliable funding is emphasised as a key feature of successful programmes.

1. Principles

The basic principles for good family literacy provision are underpinned throughout by the five guiding principles for adult literacy work set out in the NALA Quality Framework:

- The learners' right to attend on a voluntary basis and to set their own goals will be supported.
- A code of confidentiality, respect and trust will inform all aspects of provision.
- Cultural differences will be fully respected.
- Particular attention will be paid to creating and maintaining an atmosphere of social interaction, informality and enjoyment.
- Learners will be enabled to participate in all aspects of the programme, including organisation and evaluation (22).

In this context the following principles are recommended as a basis for the development of family literacy and numeracy programmes:

- The family is the first and primary educator of children and the home is the child's first and primary literacy resource.
- Family literacy work respects the difference between the various ways in which literacy and numeracy are developed and used within the home and in school.
- Family literacy work recognises that learning in families is a two-way process as the adults in the family often learn from the children and young people.
- Family literacy programmes are developed through discussion with the participants. Listening to families is at the heart of the process.
- Family literacy work respects the right of families to protect their privacy and separateness.

2. Getting started

Forming and building partnerships

The impetus for a family literacy project may come from adult education, family support or resource centres, schools or the local community. It may evolve out of a previous education or community development programme.

A particularly productive way of getting started may be to form a group of interested people. A key person will be the local Adult Literacy Organiser.

Support may be found from people such as:

- adult literacy learners and tutors;
- local school Principals;
- Home-School-Community Liaison Co-ordinator, Learning Support or Resource Teacher;
- other interested teachers; parents' representatives;
- Early Start, play-school or creche organisers or workers;
- other people involved in adult education: learners, Adult Education Organiser, Community Education Facilitator;
- Area Based Partnerships and Community Groups, especially education personnel;
- community representatives;
- groups working with refugees, asylum seekers or migrant workers;
- other organisations involved in an area, such as Barnardos or Family Resource Centres;
- Community Employment schemes;
- local School Completion Programme management committee; National Parents' Council representatives;
- health workers, including public health nurses and local doctors;
- local libraries;
- social workers or gardai;
- other groups active locally, such as men's groups, single parents' support groups;
- local clergy or lay church workers.

If it is not possible or practical to form a group, especially in the early stages of family literacy work, an Adult Literacy Organiser or Family Learning Co-ordinator may be able to liaise with one or more of the above in setting up a programme.

It may become important to decide which are the key groups for a particular project or programme, so that they can be included in building the partnership.

Initiating, planning and running family literacy programmes requires imagination, persistence and a belief that it can be helpful and supportive for the people involved.

> *"It's an eye-opener – a different way of education. I didn't know what I was letting myself in for!"*

Developing effective partnerships

Building partnerships and co-operative ways of working can be a complex process. A key feature is developing respect for each other and for different approaches to learning, education and management.

Tett (2003b) notes that:

> *the evidence suggests that partnerships are most effective when:*
>
> - *partners are clear about why they are collaborating together;*
> - *partners have agreed which areas of their work will be done together and which will still be done separately;*
> - *the unique contribution each partner brings to the relationship is recognised;*
> - *staff have time to work together to develop a common sense of purpose;*

- *shared ownership of the project is developed and people trust each other;*
- *the component organisations and individuals are committed to learning from each other and changing their own ideas as a result (4).*

If a working partnership is formed it may be important to run training and development days for the steering group, as well as the staff working on the family literacy project This may include:

- awareness training in aspects of adult education and adult literacy work for school personnel;
- guidance on how children learn and the relationship between the school and the local community for adult literacy workers;
- information and training in-puts on various aspects of adult and school education for community representatives;
- building the principles of mutual respect and sharing of information,
- how to develop effective dialogue and negotiation;
- development work on family literacy for all involved in the project;
- joint training in partnership working.

Levels of partnership

The initial level of partnership is co-operation, where partners come together to run a particular course or programme, respecting the specific skills and experience each contributes.

A further level involves the development of a collaborative approach, where partners work together over a longer period to plan and run programmes or other initiatives. At this point combined training and development become vital in order to enable individual partners to understand the skills each brings to the project and how to combine these skills in creating a new approach.

Role of senior management

If partnership or co-operative working is to be effective senior management in schools, health boards and adult education need to be interested and committed to this way of working, so that there is a willingness to fund planning and development. Time should be given to liaising with senior management at the planning stage and other key stages in the development of a family literacy project.

Building practical partnerships

With schools and pre-schools

Partnerships with schools and pre-schools work in a number of ways:

- as a means of contacting parents, carers and grandparents who may be interested in participating in a programme;
- to share expertise through joint planning and delivery;
- to pool resources through funding;
- sometimes to provide a venue and facilities.

Section 20 of the Education Act (1998) requires a commitment to achieving social inclusion as an element in School Plans. Building partnerships between the school, parents and with the wider community of interests is an important part of school planning.

In first and second level schools the Principal is a vital first point of contact in initiating partnership work. An appointment with a School Principal or a local Pre-school Organiser to give information on a family literacy programme can be a starting point for developing a collaborative way of working. The Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) can be a valuable connection where it exists. In areas where the School Completion Programme is in operation it might help to build a link with the Co-ordinator of the scheme, or with the chairperson of the management committee. In some areas the management group includes representatives from adult education.

In second level schools a link could be made with the Transition Year Co-ordinator, as teenagers are often responsible for looking after younger children in their families. Because schools at first and second level have very full timetables, finding time to work with other partners in education can be complicated. One possibility may be to suggest working with parents of infants after school, during the hour before older brothers and sisters finish. In areas where there is an Early Start Programme in place parents may be more available because of the shorter time their children are in school. It may be helpful to begin with small, short-term action plans, with built-in reviews. As in all partnership working time needs to be allowed for sharing experience and knowledge, and for regular meetings.

With parents

In order to feel part of an active partnership it is important that parents and carers:

- are involved from an early stage;
- understand why the project or programme is useful and relevant;
- find the programme interesting and supportive;

- feel that it makes sense in terms of promoting the well being of their children;
- take part in planning, organising and reviewing the programme.

If a programme is introduced through a school, attention to these details will be important in helping parents to give active support. Partnership work with parents is most effective when it is based on a clear understanding of their key role in education and respect for different perspectives and opinions.

3. Needs analysis

When a planning group has come together it is useful to spend some time analysing the kinds of educational needs that the family literacy programme will aim to address.

This can be a brief or a more complex process. Some groups will be able to build on work that has already been completed, for example Education Co-ordinators with Local Area Partnerships usually conduct a needs analysis as part of their work. Indeed the planning group may have come together as a result of a local discussion and consultation as to educational needs in the area.

Steps in the needs analysis may include:

- identifing people involved in educational provision for adults and young people in the area, such as community education, adult literacy service, Youthreach, schools, early childhood education, childcare;
- discovering, in consultation with providers and adult learners, what courses and programmes are already taking place;
- exploring what the needs are in relation to family literacy, such as: support for parents to develop their own language, literacy and numeracy skills; parenting support; courses for adults in ways of supporting their children's learning; work with specific groups such as teenage parents, fathers and sons or families where children are at points of transition;
- establishing what resources are in place to develop programmes (funding, premises, materials and equipment, childcare and tutors) and what further resources are needed, including training;
- identifing those agencies and workers who are willing and have the resources to collaborate.

The main point is to spend time considering what is most important in relation to any particular group of participants and what needs to be in place in order for a programme to work well.

> *"Maths, because I was never any good at maths. The new way of doing maths was useful."*

4. Aims and objectives

Each family literacy project will need to define its own aims and objectives, based on the needs analysis, and taking account of the core principles expressed above. This is an important stage as it helps a group to discuss and establish what is to be the focus of its work.

Aims or goals may include:

- to help families understand and support language, literacy and numeracy development in the home;
- to develop partnerships between home, schools and communities in order to promote the educational development of all age groups;
- to build the confidence of parents and carers in their role as children's first teachers;
- to help adults to enjoy reading with their children;
- to support families where the adults wish to work on their own literacy;
- to help parents to develop their own literacy and numeracy skills;
- to give direct support to developing children's literacy in a family context;
- to encourage lifelong learning.

Objectives define the more precise targets for a particular programme.

Objectives for particular projects may include a commitment to

- increase confidence in learning in both parents and children;
- develop the literacy skills of both parents and children through involvement in the programme;
- help parents and carers with concerns about their own literacy to support their children's literacy development;
- provide parents with the opportunity to work on their own literacy skills;
- enable adults to participate in a programme leading to accreditation;
- create increased motivation among the adults to take part in further education or training programmes;
- develop the language skills in English or Irish of both parents and children;
- increase the involvement of fathers and other male family members in family learning;
- support parents and older children during secondary school.

Examples

1. The *Co. Dublin VEC Staff Handbook for Family Learning* (2003) outlines five objectives for a Stage One course. These are to enable participants to:

- identify opportunities in their daily lives for teaching their children communication skills;
- read more confidently with their children using a variety of materials;
- select reading material for their children that is age appropriate and stimulating;
- discuss their child's reading with their child's teacher;
- identify options for the further development of their own literacy skills (19).

2. The *PRINTS* programme in Canada lists nine specific goals which include:

- to empower parents as early literacy providers;
- to help parents and teachers become more aware of each other's roles in early literacy development;
- to provide training for others (volunteers, assistants) so that [the programme] can be implemented as widely as possible (Fagan, 1998, 19 – 20).

Some family literacy initiatives in the USA set very broad goals, including improvement in employment prospects and breaking the cycle of poverty (Brooks *et al,* 1996, 6; Paratore, 2003, 13).

Family literacy projects in Ireland are likely to opt for the more focused, specifically educational goals.

5. Programmes

Core topics

Family literacy programmes are likely to include all or some of the following core topics:

- validating the role of the family in learning and teaching;
- recognising learning opportunities in the home;
- confidence building and group participation;
- oral language: talking; listening; rhymes, songs and poems; story-telling;

- numeracy; maths through play;
- books and stories;
- emergent and developing readers; sharing books; looking at print in the world around ('environmental print');
- 'making marks'; drawing and early writing; developing writing skills;
- 'home literacy' and 'school literacy';
- understanding how schools work and the school curriculum;
- how to represent yourself and your family effectively to other organisations, including schools;
- developing an understanding of how learning in different contexts links up and what 'lifelong learning' means.

Programmes often offer opportunities for participants to work on their own literacy and numeracy in conjunction with these topics.

In planning programmes it is essential to build on the interests and concerns of the group and to design the course through discussion with participants.

A family literacy approach can be effective with a range of age-groups, including teenagers, grandparents and siblings, as well as parents and young children.

The length of the programme will vary depending on the aims and objectives. Some are specifically outreach courses with new learners, based on discussion, information and oral or practical activities. Other courses may include specific work on literacy, sometimes leading to a qualification.

'Taster' or workshop sessions can be a useful way to introduce learners to the programme. Weekend workshops may also prove popular.

Types of programmes

Programmes are likely to fall into one of three categories:

A. Short 'outreach' courses for learners new to adult education;

B. Programmes which focus on specific skills;

C. 'Intensive' family literacy and numeracy programmes.

A: Outreach courses: Introduction to Family Learning

These are often short courses lasting 12 to 16 hours over a period of 6 to 8 weeks. The focus is on encouraging new learners to become involved in adult basic education, to understand how children learn at home and in school and to start to develop their own learning as adults and parents. For this reason many courses are based on discussion and information rather than activities involving reading and writing. However, literacy work with participants is included if this suits a particular group.

a) Family literacy with parents of pre-school children

Core sessions may include:

- group discussion and confidence building;
- how children learn at home;
- the ways in which parents can help children learn;
- how babies learn;
- learning and play;
- drawing and writing;
- home activities which develop number skills;
- talking and listening;
- adults, children and books.

> *"The big thing is to listen to children. A lot of the time we block them out a litlte. This course makes you sit back and think."*

b) Courses involving families with older children at primary school

Throughout primary school the home and family are vital in children's development and attitude to a range of learning. Programmes with families of this age group continue to emphasise the home and community as places of learning, but also address the demands of school and the requirements of school-learning.

Topics may include:

- the continuing importance of parents and home in children's learning;
- talking with children; developing children's skills in talking, discussing and expressing opinions;
- home reading, writing and numeracy activities with older children;
- learning is still fun;
- core elements of the school curriculum;

- developing confidence in relating to schools and teachers;
- homework issues;
- multiple intelligences: how sport, art, music, dance and practical activities relate to literacy and numeracy learning;
- learning through Irish;
- computer-based learning and literacy development.

Example

A 6-week programme in Co. Clare focuses on the families of primary school children. It is hoped that accreditation will be available for this locally developed module through the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC. See Appendix 3). Sessions include:

- Learning Through Play: developing the skills of
  - questioning,
  - observing,
  - predicting,
  - investigating and
  - experimenting

  through different kinds of play;
- Growing Up: personal and social development;
- Literacy Development: reading, writing and oral language development for this age-group;
- Exploring Numbers: developing confidence in numeracy.

c) Family literacy and teenagers

"I never thought my older kids would be interested, but they sit and listen too!"

Families with teenagers are deeply involved in learning and need imaginative support.

Programmes with parents may give information about transition points such as the transfer to secondary school and issues relating to the secondary school approach to learning, exams and study skills.

Programmes of interest and relevance to older children or teenagers together with their parents or carers might focus on other 'literacies' such as:

- media literacy: developing literacy skills through exploration of media issues;
- financial literacy: issues and practical financial and number skills for teenagers and their families;

- computers and other technologies (ICT);
- health related literacy.

Other topics, such as family histories based on photo albums or 'making a book' projects, are still interesting to teenagers, as are practical and creative courses linked with literacy and numeracy development.

The teenage years are a transition period for the young people and their families. In addition, many teenagers are often involved in caring for younger siblings or disabled parents or grandparents. Some older teenagers are parents themselves. This age group presents opportunities for family literacy development from many different perspectives.

Involvement with School Completion Programmes may be a useful point of contact for family literacy work with this age group. Libraries, community development groups, Youthreach and training centres are important partners at this stage of family learning. Families whose young people have special needs may be particularly interested in this approach to learning and literacy development.

Progression following introductory courses

Sometimes an introductory family literacy course can encourage learners to develop their learning further in another context, such as an adult literacy group, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) or the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). The course may also give participants the confidence to return to training or employment.

Some learners may wish to take part in several introductory courses before they are ready for a longer, more demanding programme.

Some groups will decide to move on together into another family literacy course which may include literacy development work, possibly leading to accreditation (Appendix 3).

The Adult Guidance Service may have a role in helping learners to decide ways in which they might progress from introductory programmes.

> *"It has given me more confidence and awareness in dealing with my children and with the school."*

B: Programmes which focus on particular skills

Any family literacy programme will benefit many aspects of learning. However some programmes are designed to concentrate on developing a particular skill such as language, reading, writing, numeracy or using computers.

Courses may concentrate on helping the parents to develop the children's skills in these areas, others will work more specifically with the adults on their own skills and some may be able to work with both parents and their children.

Language

A focus on language can be particularly useful with parents of very young children or families new to Ireland who wish to improve their skills in the English language.

One effective way of developing language is through practical courses based on cookery, art or drama, sometimes involving both parents and children.

Courses on ideas for playing with children often focus on language development. These again provide opportunities for children and parents to take part together. Such courses can be an enjoyable and effective learning activity for both adults and children.

Some groups working with families new to Ireland run programmes that build on story-telling traditions, rhymes and songs in both the home-language and the new language.

Other courses build on the strong oral culture of families in the Travelling Community.

Many parents wish to develop their skills in the Irish language, both for themselves and in order to help their children.

Computer skills: Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)

Courses based on teaching and using computer skills can be effective with many different groups.

Such courses can help literacy development in several ways:

- using the computer as a tool can encourage confidence in reading and writing;
- programs such as 'Storyweaver' help participants create attractive books as well as developing literacy and computer skills;

- activities such as scanning photos, illustrating stories with sound or pictures and making cards for family occasions and events introduce variety and fun;
- courses can use popular computer games to develop skills in discussion, narrative, prediction and reading;
- educational games develop numeracy skills and awareness;
- learning on and through the internet develops knowledge and skills.

Example

A 'Lads and Dads' course in Co. Offaly aims to develop confidence, literacy and computer skills with 9 year-old boys and their fathers (or other significant male relatives or care-givers).

All sessions involve the adults and children working together in pairs and as a group and include:

- introduction to using computers;
- making written notes to prepare for formal introductions to the group;
- adults and children introduce themselves formally to the group at different sessions;
- creating MS Word documents and posters;
- discussion on hobbies and writing questions arising, to discuss with another pair of learners;
- using the internet: recording and printing information from websites and giving feedback to the group;
- preparing and making presentations based on work covered.

Reading and Early Reading Support

Depending on the specific goals of the programme, together with the literacy needs or concerns and the motivation of participants, courses which focus on reading with children are likely to include the following sessions:

- why reading with children matters;
- building confidence in adults with reading difficulties;
- practising reading stories;
- ideas for reading with different age groups;
- choosing books;
- stories and non-fiction;
- using props and scenery to help understanding, involvement and enjoyment of the story;
- library visit;
- making a book.

Longer courses leading to accreditation will reflect the requirements of the awarding body. Information on relevant accreditation is given in Appendix 3.

These courses may also be adapted to focus more on direct literacy work with the participants themselves. 'Making a book' courses may be particularly suitable for this approach and may focus on art or using computers, as well as reading and writing.

> *"I used to buy clothes as baby presents. Now I buy a book. They won't grow out of the book as quickly either."*

C: 'Intensive' family literacy programmes

Courses which involve parents and children in both parallel and joint family literacy activities are often described as 'intensive' family literacy programmes, because the aim is to address both adult and children's learning over a longer period. These programmes include:

- literacy work with parents which addresses both their own literacy learning and approaches to literacy development with their children;
- literacy activities with the children;
- supervised sessions with both parents and children and their teachers during which parents and children engage together in literacy activities. The activities are usually prepared during the parents' session.

If groups decide to initiate an intensive programme for parents and children, involving schools or pre-schools, they need to include specific key elements in planning and organisation, such as:

- joint planning across the formal and non-formal contexts;
- facilitators trained in this approach.

Joint planning

Partnership and collaboration are central to the process. If intensive programmes are to have any chance of success joint planning, training and organisation are essential. The partners need to include practitioners experienced in both adult education and the education of children. Those involved also need to be committed to the family literacy approach in order to overcome the difficulties and complexities of working across traditional educational boundaries. The interest and committment of senior management is also important.

Effective organisation and planning provide the key to this approach. Once these elements are established and time set aside for regular joint preparation by key personnel, programmes can be planned to suit the area and participants involved. On a practical level, attention needs to be given to health and safety issues and insurance, which may be different if children are involved. Groups should also have appropriate child protection procedures in place.

Training

The other vital factor is the involvement of trained and experienced teachers or tutors from both children's education and adult education. Each brings special knowledge

and skills to the family literacy project. They will also need support in developing the joint approach, if the sessions for parents and children together are to be successful.

Crossing boundaries in education: schools and lifelong learning

Joint programmes can be difficult to establish because they cross formal and non-formal contexts. Schools are organised centres of learning, located within and interacting with wider communities and have a vital role to play in fostering the ability to learn outside and beyond school, and throughout life. However, for various reasons, including the pressures of the school curriculum, schools sometimes find it difficult to set aside either the time or the facilities needed for programmes involving the wider community. In addition, while many schools wish to see parents taking an interest in their children's school-work, there is sometimes not enough understanding of the importance of informal learning in the home.

Joint programmes have great potential for crossing the traditional educational boundaries of school, pre-school, adult education and community education. People working in family literacy programmes in other countries have also found this process complicated, especially in the early stages, and have found the programme beneficial for both adults and children once it becomes established (Benseman, 2003, 4-5).

Many of the programmes outlined above are effective either with adults alone or with both parents and children, over a short or longer period.

6. Tutors and training

Tutors working with adult learners in family literacy programmes need two kinds of training:

- basic and in-service training in adult literacy;
- specific training in family literacy work.

Tutors from an adult literacy background who wish to work on family literacy programmes will ideally have at least two years' experience as a tutor with an adult literacy group. This is important as family literacy and numeracy work needs a tutor who is experienced in:

- working with a range of literacy needs in a group;
- informal approaches to discovering the kind of literacy and numeracy help needed;

- ways of overcoming lack of confidence;
- the complexities of adult literacy work in general, especially in relation to suitable materials and methodologies.

Tutors working specifically with children in the more 'intensive' programmes, should have training and experience in early childhood education or school learning.

Issues important in training for family literacy work include:

- the ethos and principles of family literacy work;
- background to the family literacy concept;
- practical training for the planning and delivery of particular programmes;
- making materials;
- games and play;
- language development;
- numeracy work with families;
- training in information and communication technology (ICT) relevant to family literacy work;
- training in forming and developing partnerships in family literacy provision;
- developing local and national networks;
- combined training for tutors and teachers from different backgrounds in adult, school and pre-school learning.

Training for tutors should include both accredited and non-accredited courses.

7. Recruiting participants

Part of the process of planning a programme involves decisions about who the course is for. Ideas about how to contact participants will arise from these decisions. The locality, the partnership and decisions about the type of programme will influence approaches to recruiting people who may be interested.

If this is an outreach programme plenty of time, imagination and persistence may be needed at this stage.

The emphasis will be on contacting parents or carers with no or few educational qualifications, especially those who may be interested in working on their own literacy and numeracy as well as learning how to help and support their children's learning.

As in all adult literacy work, many groups will find personal contact the most effective way to recruit new learners:

- interested parents already attending adult literacy tuition may bring along friends, neighbours or relatives;
- a school-teacher involved in the programme may be able to establish contact with the parents of children in their class;
- a School Principal, a Home-School Community Liaison (HSCL) Co-ordinator, Learning Support Teacher, Resource Teacher, or other interested teachers can often talk informally with parents or carers about a particular course and encourage them to come along to a taster morning or enrolment day;
- community workers, creche or pre-school workers, community education facilitators, school parents' associations, social workers, public health nurses and local clergy may also already be in touch with possible participants.

In addition to personal contacts other ways of reaching people include: leaflets into individual letter boxes; local radio; local press; posters and church notices.

Other approaches may involve broad liaison with local schools.

Example

In the Crumlin and Ballyfermot areas of Dublin some primary schools organise talks by the Adult Literacy Organiser at general parents' meetings.

Topics such as ways of working with and supporting children, or suggestions on reading with children often prove popular and helpful to parents.

These meetings develop relationships and raise the profile of adult literacy work within the local community and can also include specific information about adult literacy and family literacy programmes. This encourages parents who wish to work on their own and their children's literacy to make contact after the meeting. Family literacy programmes develop out of these contacts.

Sometimes taster or 'workshop' sessions held on one morning or evening, or at the weekend, are an attractive and less threatening way to make contact with people who may be interested but uncertain about taking part in a course.

8. Funding

Funding for family literacy work can be complicated because it stretches across the usual boundaries for educational funding. It is often necessary to seek funding from a range of sources.

Family literacy programmes run by adult literacy providers can draw on the budget provided by the Department of Education and Science for adult literacy work. Sometimes the VEC (Vocational Education Committee) community education budget is also available for this kind of work. However if projects wish to include work with children, this can complicate the issue.

Some family literacy projects have applied for funding from bodies such as:

- The Home-School-Community Liason (HSCL) programme;
- Local Area Based Partnerships or Community Groups;
- Health Boards;
- Local trusts or charities;
- The Department of Social and Family Affairs.

The need to seek funding from a range of sources, which are often 'dedicated' to specific aspects of education or community development, is time consuming and is at

present limiting the development of family literacy work. In some areas family literacy outreach work has suffered first when budgets have been unexpectedly reduced.

9. Practical issues

Childcare

Access to good childcare facilities for participants with pre-school children should be seen as an essential and integral part of family literacy provision. It may also be needed for school age children if the course runs after school hours. Childcare provision can mean the difference between a successful programme or one that fails at an early stage.

Attention to childcare may involve setting up a new childcare facility, with the funding and staffing issues that entails. If it is possible to gain access to existing childcare provision this may be more helpful and beneficial for the adults and children involved. If young children are not used to the creche or play school time should be allowed for both adults and children to settle in to the arrangement.

The nature of the childcare provision is particularly important if the aim is to set up a joint programme involving both adults and children actively. In this case the childcare providers and workers need to be involved in the planning and delivery of the course.

Depending on the participants, funding for both capital and staffing costs for childcare may be available from the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme run through the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Local City and County Childcare Committees have plans, staff and information which may be of assistance.

In some areas employers may be interested in providing locally-based childcare as a support for employees and their families.

Premises

The choice of premises will vary according to the aims and objectives of the programme, the participants and the providing partners.

Some projects regard it as important to run courses in schools as this is a key element in building relationships and understanding between participating adults and local schools. In particular it is seen as a way of breaking down the fear and other

barriers felt by many adults who had unhappy school experiences themselves. Some schools have a parents' room, which may be suitable for family literacy programmes.

Other projects regard the fact that many new adult learners are uncomfortable or uneasy in school surroundings as a reason for running courses in other premises. In addition, many schools do not have the resources to accommodate an adult group.

Projects will therefore have to take account of local circumstances in choosing premises for particular courses and decisions are likely to vary both between areas and between different groups in any particular area. The important point is to establish what is available and, if possible, to discuss the issue with the participants.

Access to childcare will also influence the decision, as will the need for particular resources such as art facilities or computers.

Adult learners are entitled to enjoy their courses in pleasant surroundings, with adult size chairs and tables, natural light wherever possible, access to kitchen or other coffee and tea-making facilities and adult toilets.

Other possible premises include:

- training centres;
- job centres;
- sports venues;
- libraries;
- community and family centres;
- community-based computer facilities or internet cafes;
- workplace learning centres.

Travel

Course venues need to be easily accessible to participants, especially as many may be walking with small children. If necessary, projects may need to consider support to make access easier, either through travel bursaries or by providing transport. This issue will affect significantly the choice of premises.

Times

A quality family literacy service offers a range of programmes at a variety of times and venues, to facilitate parents and carers who are in the workforce or have other family or community commitments.

Weekend workshops may prove useful or popular as another way of running family literacy events involving parents and children who might otherwise not be able to take part.

The time of year can be a key factor in setting up family literacy programmes. Some places have found that the spring is a particularly good time, while other find autumn the best. Christmas and the summer holidays can cause difficulties, though some areas run successful summer projects involving family literacy with a special emphasis on outings, creative and 'fun' activities.

10. Evaluation

The process of monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of all adult and community education. The primary aim of evaluation is to monitor the quality of the learning process and outcomes, and to introduce changes or adapt the programme in response to issues arising in the evaluation process.

Evaluations "serve a variety of purposes, including:

- accountability to funders;
- programme improvement;
- individual records of learning" (Benseman, 2004, 46).

Projects therefore need to be clear on the purpose of their evaluations.

Approaches to evaluation include:

- group discussion;
- individual evaluation sheets;
- 'brainstorming' and analysis.

Key points to remember are to:

- allow enough time for useful and satisfactory evaluation as part of the programme;
- involve all participants and staff;
- evaluate all aspects of a programme, including content, approaches, staffing, facilities, venue and timing;
- consider the experience of the programme in relation to the original aims and objectives;
- include the opportunity for people to express individual views and to discuss their experience as a group;
- regard evaluation as a important stage in planning future programmes.

Some projects may find it useful to refer to the NALA *Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education* (O'Riordan and Donohoe, 2002). Others will have different approaches to evaluation, relevant to their group and context.

If a project decides that an in-depth evaluation of a particular programme would be helpful it is best to employ an external evaluator.

One element of evaluation may include how tutors and learners review the learning

that is taking place, what content and approaches are most helpful and what should be addressed in further learning. Tutors experienced in adult literacy work will be comfortable with the informal and on-going approaches to discovering individual and group needs and starting points, together with identifying progress and continuing learning needs. These approaches integrate review and evaluation as part of learning. The process described in *Mapping the Learning Journey* (NALA, 2004) may provide a helpful structure for tutors and learners.

At present it is particularly important that evaluation and research explore "what adults learn through family literacy efforts and what implications this has for teaching and research in adult basic education" (Gadsden, 2002, 262).

Summary

- Family literacy projects need to clarify the principles, aims and objectives which will inform their work.
- Partnership is a key feature of family literacy work and may require commitment to training and development work to develop the partnership. It is important that senior management personnel support the partnership approach. Partnership work with schools, pre-schools and community organisations can be especially important.
- Programmes should be designed in conjunction with learners.
- Projects need to pay attention to issues such as funding, childcare, premises, recruitment and evaluation.

Part Four

Recommendations and NALA Strategy

Part Four

Recommendations and NALA Strategy

The development of varied, comprehensive and effective family literacy work in a range of settings requires planning and commitment at local and national level.

Part Four presents recommendations for the development of family literacy work and proposals for a NALA strategy on family literacy, under the following headings:

1. National Strategy
2. Funding
3. Staffing
4. Training
5. Partnership development
6. Awareness and promotion
7. Accreditation
8. Materials
9. Research

Recommendations for the development of family literacy work

1. National Strategy

In the light of the importance of parental involvement in literacy development and the role of the home in education at all ages, there is now a need for the Department of Education and Science to take a lead role in promoting an integrated national strategy for the development of family literacy work as part of its strategy for literacy development.

The national strategy should involve collaboration with other relevant Government Departments: the Department of Health and Children; the Department of Social and Family Affairs; and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

In particular, partners in education and community development need structures which promote collaborative work on programmes involving children and adults, together and separately.

Under a national strategy, organisations involved in:

- adult literacy provision;
- adult and community education;
- school and early childhood education;
- training;
- workplace education;
- community development;

should be required to develop local policies for including a partnership approach to family literacy in their work.

2. Funding

Core Funding

If family literacy work is to develop fully and effectively as an integral part of education provision nationally, it needs to become part of the overall educational budget, rather than having to seek special grants from a variety of sources.

The Department of Education and Science is therefore urged to establish a dedicated family literacy budget.

Seed funding

Vocational Education Committees and other organisations involved in adult basic education, such as FAS, Teagasc and Local Area Partnerships, should set aside specific funding for the development of family literacy work.

Schools should allocate a similar budget for family literacy programmes run on a partnership basis with adult basic education providers.

In particular programmes such as Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL), Early Start, School Completion, and any future initiatives addressing educational disadvantage, should designate funding for partnership work in family literacy.

3. Staffing

If family literacy work is to be developed effectively in an area a family learning co-ordinator or outreach worker is needed. This worker should be allowed paid time for meetings, development and co-ordination, and for joint planning and delivery with community or school partners.

Family literacy courses with adult learners, wherever they are based, require adult literacy tuition skills. Such courses should be facilitated and taught by paid tutors with experience as group tutors in adult literacy work. Family literacy tutors need specific training in family literacy work.

Projects running 'intensive' family literacy programmes need tutors trained and experienced in the education of children. This may be at school or pre-school level, depending on the programme.

4. Training

Family literacy tutors and co-ordinators.

Training in family literacy work for tutors and co-ordinators should be provided as part of both accredited and non-accredited courses.

Family literacy projects involved in intensive family literacy programmes will also need to organise joint staff development and planning days for both adult literacy tutors and school or pre-school teachers.

School staff

Initial teacher-training courses for all school teachers, especially at primary level, should include an exploration of:

- the concept of parents as primary educators;
- the relationship between parents and schools;
- cultural differences;
- the concepts of family literacy and home literacy;
- the complex nature of adult literacy issues;
- how to support and involve parents who may lack confidence in their own literacy.

The training programme for Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) Co-ordinators at both national and local level should include an input on approaches to family literacy work based on partnership with adult literacy providers and community organisations. The possibility of developing joint parent-child programmes through active co-operation between schools and adult basic education should be explored.

An introduction to the concept of family literacy work and the importance of a partnership approach should be included in training for the Early Start, School Completion and other similar programmes. It should also be included in training for Learning Support and Resource Teachers.

5. Partnership development

Adult education organisations and providers and community development groups should provide training in developing effective partnership approaches to working with families and communities in the family literacy context.

Training for staff involved in the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and Early Start programmes should include similar modules.

Conferences and seminars on parental involvement in education, family learning and community education and development should include a regular focus on ways of developing partnerships relevant to family literacy.

6. Awareness and promotion of family literacy

The concept of family literacy is not widely understood. It is therefore important to take every opportunity to promote awareness of this dimension of adults' and children's learning as an aspect of:

- adult education, especially adult literacy;
- community education and development;
- child development and education;
- training and workplace learning.

Responsibility for this should be shared by all education partners, community work and teacher training institutions and community development groups.

Adult education organisations and other education bodies and can play a particularly effective role in raising the profile of family literacy by including it in awareness campaigns and lobbying work.

7. Accreditation for adult learners

Programmes and modules for family learning accreditation should be developed at the new NQAI (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland) National Framework of Qualifications Levels 1, 2 and 3, in conjunction with local education providers and FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council. See Appendix 3)

8. Materials

Imaginative, practical and suitable materials for all aspects of family literacy work should be included in publications for pre-school, school, community and adult education.

9. Research

Participatory and action research work is needed to explore important aspects of family literacy. Such research would contribute greatly to the informed development of family literacy work in Ireland.

Suggested areas for research include:

- the use and development of literacy at home (home literacies), in both rural and urban communities;
- the differences and the relationship between 'home' and 'school' literacies in the Irish context;

- evaluations of particular family literacy programmes, both during the programme, to help its development (formative evaluation), and at the end (summative);
- innovative family literacy work;
- ways of developing good practice in inter-agency and partnership working in the field of family literacy;
- the impact of family literacy programmes on adult learners and the implications for adult basic education practice;
- the impact of family literacy on children;
- the contribution of family literacy programmes to community development;
- language development as a feature of family literacy work;
- the relationship between literacy and language development.

NALA strategy for developing family literacy work

NALA should include the following as part of its strategy, both short-term (2004 – 2006) and longer term.

National Strategy for family literacy development

- NALA should play a prominent role in lobbying for the development of a National Strategy on family literacy at government level.

Funding

- As part of its lobbying role NALA should start to prioritise this issue with the Department of Education and Science, with the aim of securing a designated family literacy budget.
- NALA should seek funding for innovative development work in family literacy.

Staffing

- Family Literacy Project Worker: It is important that family literacy work is included as an area of responsibility for a Development Worker within NALA.
- NALA should encourage and support local providers to appoint resource or outreach workers with special responsibility for family literacy work.

Training

- NALA should:
  - continue to work with the Literacy Development Centre at Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) to review and develop modules on family literacy at certificate and degree level, as an integral element of the NALA-WIT training programme for adult literacy work;
  - provide regular in-service development and networking opportunities for family literacy providers;
  - promote the inclusion of the concept of family literacy in all adult literacy training for tutors;
  - promote family literacy as a feature of initial training and in-service development for school-teachers.

Partnership development

- NALA should organise training in developing effective partnership approaches for a range of groups and organisations relevant to the development of family literacy programmes.
- NALA conferences and seminars on family literacy should include a regular focus on ways of developing partnerships and inter-agency work.

Development Work

- NALA should seek funding for a development grant fund for a two-year period to develop family literacy projects in local areas, with an emphasis on partnership and innovation.
- In addition NALA should seek funding for two pilot 'intensive' family literacy programmes, to assess the feasibility of such programmes in the Irish context, as part of a varied and flexible framework for family literacy.

Accreditation for learners

- NALA should promote the development of programmes and modules for family learning accreditation at Levels 1, 2 and 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications. In particular NALA should work with the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in relation to developing this accreditation.

Awareness and promotion

- NALA should include family literacy in general adult literacy awareness training, and promote its inclusion in initial training courses for tutors
- The RTE - NALA *Read, Write, Now* TV and Radio series have included elements of family literacy. This should be further developed as an important feature in future series.
- An awareness of the family literacy dimension should become an integral part of all NALA's work.

Materials

- NALA should include a range of appropriate materials for various aspects of family literacy work in its ongoing commitment to developing materials for adult literacy work.

Research

- NALA should:
  - prioritise research into aspects of family literacy as part of its general research programme;
  - continue to work with the Literacy Development Centre at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) on developing research projects related to family literacy;
  - commission research projects from other individuals or interested agencies into particular aspects of family literacy and family literacy work.

Support

- NALA should:
  - facilitate the formation of networks among learners, organisers, co-ordinators, tutors and researchers involved in family literacy programmes;
  - organise and promote regular conferences and seminars on issues related to family literacy, involving all the education partners. It may be particularly effective if these are organised jointly by NALA and other interested bodies.

Family Literacy Development Group

- In order to facilitate and further the development of family literacy work it is suggested that NALA should set up a Family Literacy Development Group for a two-year period, to include personnel from NALA and the Department of Education and Science, together with representatives from various interest groups and key stakeholders.

Conclusion

Family literacy work opens new doors for adults, children and families, for schools, for adult education and community development. It is an approach to education that recognises that learning does not necessarily take place in defined places at defined times. Instead it aims to support and develop the learning that happens in families and communities all the time and to help families discover and create learning opportunities for themselves.

Family literacy approaches can build connections which help children learn more effectively and with greater confidence. Family literacy programmes also encourage adults to work on their own literacy and numeracy, both for themselves and to support their children's learning and development.

It is vital that the strengths of this approach to education are now recognised and supported by all the education partners, to the benefit of adults, children and communities.

Appendices

Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

Information

Addresses and websites

Ireland

Area Development Management (ADM)

Holbrook House,
Holles Street, Dublin 2
Tel. (01) 240 0700
www.adm.ie

Contact details for Education Co-ordinators with Area Based Partnerships and Local Community Groups are available from the National Education Co-ordinator.

Barnardos

National Children's Resource Centre,
Christchurch Square, Dublin 8.
Tel. (01) 454 9699
email: ncrc@barnardos.ie
www.barnardos.ie

Regional Offices in Athlone, Cork, Galway and Limerick.

Clare Family Learning Project Ltd.

Adult and Community Education Centre,
Clonroad Business Park,
Ennis, Co. Clare.
Tel. (065) 682 4819
email: famlearn@eircom.net
website: http://homepage.eircom.net/~famlearn

Department of Education and Science

Marlborough Street, Dublin 1
Tel. (01) 889 6400
www.education.ie

Follow the 'social inclusion' links for information and reports on programmes relevant to educational disadvantage and family literacy work.

Literacy Development Centre

Department of Adult and Continuing Education,
Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT),
Cork Road,Waterford.
Tel. (051) 302 689
email: literacy@wit.ie

National Adult Literacy Agency

76 Lower Gardiner Street,
Dublin 1.
Tel. (01) 855 4332
email: literacy@nala.ie
www.nala.ie

NALA has information on local and workplace adult literacy services, family literacy projects and other adult literacy developments, research, publications and resources.

Contact information for Adult Literacy Organisers throughout the country are available from the National or Regional offices and on the website.

NALA also runs a website with exercises and worksheets for learners and tutors in adult and family literacy: www.literacytools.ie

Northern Ireland

Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education

Tower Street,
Belfast.
Tel. 0289 026 5000

Information about the 'Extending Family Literacy' training course for tutors.

Northern Ireland Open College Network

University of Ulster,
Art and Design,
1-51 York Street,
Belfast, BT15 1ED
Tel. 0289 032 0511
www.niocn.co.uk

Information about 'Reading to Children: Theory and Practice', 'Read to Succeed' and other family literacy courses in Northern Ireland.

International

Learning Connections, Scotland

Communities Scotland,
27-29 Palmerston Place,
Edinburgh, EH12 5AP
www.learningconnections.uk

Information, views and newsletters about adult literacies in Scotland, including family and youth literacies.

National Adult Literacy Database, Canada

601 – 510 West Hastings Street,
Vancouver, BC V6B 1L8
Tel. 00 1 604 684 8520
www.nald.ca

Useful and wide-ranging information about adult and family literacy in Canada.

National Center for Family Literacy, USA

325 West Main Street, Suite 300,
Lousville, KY 40202-4237
Tel. 001 502 584 1133
www.famlit.org

Information on policy and programmes in the US based on the Kenan model of family literacy.

National Family Learning Network, UK

Campaign for Learning,
Spaces Business Centre, Elite House,
70 Warwick Street, Birmingham, B12 0NL
Tel. 0044 121 773 3133
www.familylearningnetwork.com
www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/familylearningnetwork

Information on a broad range of events and contacts for family learning.
The network runs regular family learning conferences in various parts of the UK.
The website includes access to family learning resources which can be downloaded.

National Literacy Trust, UK

Swire House,
59 Buckingham Gate,
London SW1E 6AJ
Tel. 0044 207 828 2435
www.literacytrust.org.uk

This organisation and website has a lot of information, ideas and articles about literacy for all age groups and including family literacy. The website has a useful and wide-ranging list of publications and resources.

The Basic Skills Agency, UK

Commonwealth House,
1 – 19 New Oxford St.,
London WC1A 1NU
Tel. 0044 207 405 4017
www.basic-skills.co.uk
www.familyprogrammes.org
www.skillsforfamilies.org

The Basic Skills Agency is a national development agency for literacy and numeracy. It co-ordinates and provides information on programmes relating to literacy work with all age-groups.

BSA publications and website information include detailed guidance on family programmes, including 'Skills for Families', 'Keeping Up with The Children', 'ICT Family Literacy and Numeracy' and 'Early Start'.

Appendix 3

Accreditation for learners

Current FETAC (NCVA) modules

Foundation Level

At present, groups interested in FETAC accreditation for family literacy work with adults or young adults prepare portfolios for a range of NCVA modules at Foundation Level. These include:

Caring for Children
Child Development and Play
Communications
Food and Nutrition
Food and Cookery
Mathematics
Personal Effectiveness
Personal and Interpersonal Skills.

For information contact:
FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council)
East Point Plaza,
East Point Business Park,
Dublin 3.
Phone: (01) 865 9500
website: www.fetac.ie
email: information@fetac.ie

FETAC (NCVA) modules can be downloaded from www.ncva.ie

Locally developed modules

Early Reading Support: Current Levels One and Two
Module Descriptors for the modules in Early Reading Support at Level One and Level Two are available as follows:

Level One (Code No. L 12093)

OAK Partnership,
Edenderry Business Park,
Edenderry, Co. Offaly.
Education Co-ordinator: Karina Curley
Tel. (046) 97 32688
Fax: (046) 97 32690
email: karina@oakpartnership.com

Level Two (Code No. D 20007)

Sligo Leader Partnership Co.,
Sligo Development Centre,
Cleveragh Road,
Sligo.
Tel. (071) 9141138
email: info@sligoleader.ie
For the attention of Geri Bruce.

There may also be new Family Learning modules at Level Two available from the Clare Family Learning Project.

It is necessary to apply in writing and to obtain written permission to deliver these modules.

Foundation Level Module in Family Literacy

The Clare Family Learning Project is preparing a locally-devised module in family literacy work with families of school-age children. It is hoped that this will be available nationally.

Contact the Clare Family Learning Project (see Appendix 2) for information and permission to deliver this module.

New Accreditation Levels

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has prepared a National Qualifications Framework from levels 1 to 10.

The present FETAC (NCVA) Foundation Level modules are likely to be placed at level 3 on this framework.

An expert working group is currently working with FETAC to prepare a pilot programme for accreditation at the new levels 1 and 2, which will be appropriate for adult and family literacy work.

National Adult Literacy Agency
76 Gardiner Street
Dublin 1

Telephone 01 855 4332
Fax 01 855 5475
e-mail literacy@nala.ie
Website www.nala.ie

NALA Freephone
1 800 20 20 65

NALA Mullingar
Education and Employment Centre
Austin Friar Street
Mullingar
Co. Westmeath

Telephone 044 40374
Fax 044 45834
e-mail nalamullingar@eircom.net

NALA Cork
c/o VTSU Building
Tramore Road
Cork

Telephone 021 431 7011
Fax 021 431 5054
e-mail mmurray@nala.ie

What is NALA?

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is the co-ordinating, training and campaigning body for all those interested and involved in adult literacy work in Ireland.

NALA is a membership-based organisation and was formally established in 1980. Since 1985 NALA has received a grant-in-aid from the Department of Education and Science.

Working Together: *Approaches to Family Literacy*

This document explores the concept of family literacy, describes some of the family literacy work taking place internationally and in Ireland and offers guidelines for setting up and running family literacy programmes.

NDP
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

European Union
Structural Funds

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NALA
An Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh
National Adult Literacy Agency