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Informing Approaches in Establishing Stand Alone Community Literacy Programmes in South Africa

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Abstract

Literacy is usually considered the ability to read at a basic level. Now it is beginning to be defined more broadly to include applying reading, writing, and mathematical skills to obtain and use information and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function in society, to achieve one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential. 'Family Literacy' is an intergeneration approach to literacy activities. Comprehensive family literacy services provide a holistic, fully integrated, family-focused approach, providing parents and children most in need of improving their literacy skills with intensive, frequent and long-term educational and non-educational services. Through the Technikon Northern Gauteng Research Capacity Building project, I initiated the Soshanguve Family Literacy programme in the surrounding community of Soshanguve. The Soshanguve Family Literacy Programme provides the following activities: Adult Education, Childhood Education or Program Your Child for Success, Parent Education, Interactive Parent/Child Activities (PACT TIME).

Résumé

Ne pas être analphabète signifie savoir lire à un niveau basique. A présent, ce concept commence à être élargi, et inclut les diverses applications à la lecture, à l'écriture et aux mathématiques, permettant d'obtenir, d'utiliser des informations et de résoudre des problèmes, à un niveau de compétence favorisant une certaine évolution au sein de la société, de sorte que chacun puisse réaliser ses objectifs et développer ses propres connaissances, ainsi que son potentiel. Le concept d'«éducation familiale» est une approche intergénérationnelle aux activités d'éducation. Les services intégraux d'éducation familiale offrent une approche holistique, pleinement intégrée et centrée sur la famille, qui fournit aux parents et aux enfants qui ont le plus besoin d'améliorer leur niveau d'éducation, des

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services éducationnels et non éducationnels intensifs et fréquents, dans le long-terme. A travers le projet 'Technikon Northern Gauteng Research Capacity Building' – projet de renforcement de capacité – j'ai initié le programme Soshanguve d'éducation familiale, dans la communauté voisine de Soshanguve. Le programme Soshanguve d'éducation familiale propose les activités suivantes : Education pour les adultes, Education des Enfants ou encore 'Program Your Child for Success' (Programmez votre enfant pour la réussite), l'Education Parentale, activités interactives parents/enfant(PACT TIME).

Background

In South Africa, nearly 1.5 million babies are born each year (*The Star* 2002). Each baby enters the world with immense promise. Each arrives with billions of brain cells just waiting to have their power unlocked. Many of these cells have already begun to link up to one another, but a newborn's brain has yet to form the roughly 100 trillion connections that make up an adult's complex neural networks. From the very first days of life, brain cells connect at an astonishing pace. Young brains forge more than enough connections in the first 3 years of life. For these connections to form and proliferate, cells need a crucial ingredient: experience in the world (United States Department of Education 1999).

At this stage, the brain's capacity is nearly unfathomable in terms of its intricacy and power. It defies even the greatest modern computer technology. It is capable of processing up to 30 billion bits of information per second and boasts the equivalent of 6,000 miles of wiring and cabling. Typically the human nervous system contains about 28 billion neurons (nerve cells designed to conduct impulses). Without neurons, our nervous systems will be unable to interpret the information we receive through sense organs, unable to convey it to the brain and unable to carry out instructions from the brain as to what to do. Each of these neurons is a tiny, self-contained computer capable of processing about million bits of information; this is the immense power 3-year old children have at their disposal (Robbins 1992). This incredible computer only awaits programming from parents and guardians.

This is good news for humans. It means that our newborns' capacities, their unique ways of thinking, knowing, and acting, develop in the world, under the sway of the adults who love and nurture them. This is in line with the well-regarded adage that the family is the strongest element in shaping lives.

The family is an essential element in literacy development

National Center for Family Literacy – Kentucky (2001) views the family, as 'the most powerful support network there is where the cycle of learning begins, where the attitudes of parents about learning become the

educational values of the children. The family is an essential element in the economic and social development of a progressive and compassionate society. It is within the bosom of the family that values are handed down from one generation to the next'. Children who grow up in a family where reading and books are valued develop an attachment to books and learning. Conversely, children who grow up in a family where parents are illiterate or have low literacy skills do not go very far in their educational endeavors. Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. They are uniquely qualified to pass on the richness of literacy to their children.

The importance of family literacy programmes

What if the parents have low literacy levels such that they are unable to transfer literacy values to their children? Does this mean that their children are doomed for failure in life just because they have illiterate parents who poison them with illiteracy? This is the clarion call of setting up community family literacy programmes in identified needy communities. The potentials of such programmes are that educational values are instilled in parents who eventually transfer them to their children. In this way, the cycle where parents automatically pass on their illiteracy to their children is halted. Once parents are empowered to be able to impart educational values to their children in their early age our society is also empowered (NCFL 2000).

Family literacy programmes can play an important role in reconstructing and developing townships like Soshanguve LVV, which were marginalised by the apartheid government. The Soshanguve LVV, like most black townships, has a high concentration of people who are functionally illiterate. Family literacy programmes hold immense potential to the global developmental initiatives of balancing the scales of the rich nations and the poor nations.

Problem statement

According to Project Literacy Annual report (2000), 40 percent of South African adults are functionally illiterate, and these include Soshanguve LVV residents. This results in parents not providing good support in their children in early literacy development. Consequently, these parents pass on their low literacy to their children, creating an ongoing cycle of illiteracy, poverty and under-achievement with a devastating impact on the economic development of the country.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were to:

- Identify the literacy level of parents in the community of Soshanguve LVV;
- Identify the level in which parents support the literacy development of their children at home in the community of Soshanguve LVV;
- Identify the a suitable intervention programme which could be used to promote literacy in the community of Soshanguve LVV;
- Pilot the intervention programme in Soshanguve LVV families.

Significance of the study

After the implementation of the family literacy programme, it is hoped that parents in Soshanguve LVV will:

- Learn to become more self-sufficient and independent;
- Be able to share challenges and to support one another;
- Have the chance to reach their educational goals and gain valuable skills needed for better job opportunities;
- Learn to blend work and educational activities;
- Nurture their children become better prepared to be successful students as they continue their education;
- Become active participants in their children's education and are better prepared to take the role as their children's first teachers;
- Grow together through learning and shared experiences.

Literature review

In seeking to solve the problem, it would be futile should we simply accept the idea that adult basic education programmes can solve this problem. In almost all developing countries, Adult Basic Education programmes have been running for more than fifty years but this vicious cycle has been continuing at a breath-taking tempo. Tanzania and Nicaragua had world-renowned adult literacy campaigns, yet their current adult illiteracy rates are Tanzania 32. 2 percent and Nicaragua 34. 5 percent, respectively. Cuba is generally recognised as having the most successful Adult Literacy Programme with 4. 3 percent illiterate adults, but there were fewer than one million illiterate adults at the time when the Adult Basic Education started (Project Literacy annual report 2000).

Through a large-scale literature search in the quest to answer these questions, one comes across the concept of family literacy programmes. Sharon Darling (1996), the President of the United States Center for

National Family Literacy, regards family literacy programmes as powerful interventions, which holds great promise for the future in breaking the intergenerational cycle of under-education, poverty and dependency. Brizius and Foster (1993) remark that family literacy programmes improve the educational opportunities for children and parents by providing both learning experiences and group support. They argue that family literacy programmes provide disadvantaged children with educational opportunities that can enable them to lift themselves out of poverty and dependency. According to Gordon (2000), family literacy programmes are effective in that instead of repairing ruined, brokenhearted children who come from illiterate families, they prepare children for a good start in their schooling and empower parents with educational values and skills, which they transfer to their newborn children.

What exactly are family literacy programmes? Family literacy programs are services of sufficient intensity and duration to make sustainable changes in a family and that integrate the following activities:

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

The International Reading Foundation (2001) regards family literacy programmes as those services encompassing the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in the community.

A family literacy programme is one which:

- Is conceptualised around the needs and concerns of the family; in contrast to adult basic education programmes, which serves individual family members in isolation.
- Contains an educational component, which affects the child's literacy or development.
- Contains an educational component for the adult-providing both literacy activities and a parenting education component for the adult to attain proficiency in basic skills;
- Includes at least one activity focussing on the exchange of knowledge and information between the adult and the child;
- Is developed based on the community needs and family recommendations (Minnis 2001:2).

Activities include side-by-side reading, modeling of child development practices, reading aloud, storytelling etc.

Description of family literacy models

The most commonly used frame of reference for classifying family and intergenerational literacy programs, is Ruth Nickse's typology of four basic models. Nickse classifies family literacy programmes according to the type of participant (adult and/or child) and the degree of intervention (direct or indirect). The degree of intervention refers to 'whether or not the adult and the child are present together for literacy development any or all of the time' (Nickse 1990: 29). 'Primary' participants receive direct services, 'secondary' participants benefit indirectly.

Briefly these four models are:

Type 1: Direct Adults – Direct Children

This model involves programming for both parents and pre-school child. Parents attend literacy instruction and may participate in parenting education, vocational training or volunteer in the program or children's classroom. 'Parent and child together' activities are also a key feature, and may include instruction on how to interact and play with children, as well as how to read to them. Programmes use a dual curriculum and direct instruction that is class-based. Children take part in a structured early childhood or preschool programme.

Type 2: Indirect Adults – Indirect Children

Adults (who may or may not be the parents) and children attend together. The goal is the promotion of literacy for enjoyment. There is no sequential curriculum, rather a series of reading enrichment events, such as storytelling, book talks, and library activities. Reading pal programmes involving adult volunteers are another example of this type of programme.

Type 3: Direct Adults – Indirect Children

Adults are the main targets for this type of programme, while children do not participate regularly, if at all. Programmes may include literacy or English language instruction, or instruction in reading children's stories or other behaviours that assist children. The goal is to help adults become more literate so they may positively influence their children's literacy development.

Type 4: Indirect Adults – Direct Children

Pre-school and school-going children are the primary recipients of the service in this type of programme. Parents may be invited to participate, but usually do not receive literacy instruction for their own needs.

Family literacy programmes can be set up in any community with relative ease and with little or no costs. The key factor in setting up a family literacy programme in any community is to undertake community research in order to get to know the people in the community. To familiarise ourselves with a typical family literacy programme in practice let us look at five successful family literacy programmes in Canada: Parent-Child Mother Goose, Books for Babies, Book Bridges, and Homespun.

Parent – Child Mother Goose

In this family literacy programme, parents and their children are invited to attend weekly sessions for about one and half-hours each week. This is a group experience for parents and their babies and young children, focusing on the pleasure and power of songs and stories together. The Programme is preventative in nature. The parents are helped to gain skills and confidence, which can enable them to create new and positive family patterns during their children's crucial early years.

The activities of the programme are centered on oral literature. Parents and children sit in a circle on the floor with two group leaders and listen to stories. Teaching is directed to parents with children participating, napping or wandering as is appropriate to their age. The atmosphere is relaxed and accepting, with time for informal visits and snacks.

The teachers encourage the parents to:

- Use language with their children from infancy on;
- Touch their children appropriately: firmly but gently;
- Really look at their children: making eye contact and observing the child accurately;
- Notice what the other children are doing.

Each session ends with a story told to the parents – giving them the same sort of pleasure in language and listening that they can give to their children. The stories told, usually folk tales, often prompt discussion of important issues.

Books for babies

The primary objective of the Books for Babies family literacy programme is to contribute to family well-being by enhancing literacy development of children beginning at birth and continuing through pre-school years, so that each child has a greater opportunity to become a self-directed, lifelong independent learner. Volunteer librarians present children's books to parents of newborns at the Cardston Municipal Hospital. The volunteers explain both the project and the importance of reading to children from birth (Canadian Literacy Database 2000).

Book bridges

Book Bridges is a family literacy programme that uses children's literature selections to engage learners and explore reading of family stories, fables and folk tales. The programme also includes writing workshops where parents create their own biographies and develop their own family stories. The children of participants are indirectly involved sharing these biographies and family stories which their mothers bring home each week. The programme also seeks to enhance the relationship between the participants and their children and to encourage reading as a lifelong activity. Effort is made to make explicit connections between the writing and reading strategies participants are learned in the workshops and how they may support their children at home. The volunteers, many of whom are parents themselves, also find the strategies beneficial.

Children's literature selections constitute the reading material. Good stories have the power to draw the reader back again and again. Within this context, half-formed ideas are explored and resolved through listening and responding to the interpretations of others. Reading also provides the motivation for writing. In identifying with the stories of published authors, we are reminded of similar happenings in our own lives and we, too, are inspired to write. The programme also embeds reading, listening and speaking by employing a process approach to writing. Writing provides opportunities for both listening and oral expression, as successive drafts are read, ideas shared and feedback sought through conferencing. (Canadian National Literacy Database 2000).

Homespun

The best known of family literacy programmes in Alberta is the Homespun Family Literacy Project developed at Brooks Campus of Medicine Hat College. Homespun officially began in January 1991 with the mandate of reaching at-risk families and providing parents with instruction on how to read with their children and how to encourage a supportive literacy environment in the home.

Homespun began with a model developed in Raleigh, North Carolina called 'Motherhead'. In the Motherhead, programme mothers met once or twice weekly to share children's literature centred on a particular child development theme. The Homespun instructor/coordinator received the curriculum and training from the Motherhead headquarters.

Modifications to the Motherhead model to more truly reflect our population and to include Canadian content led to the evolution of the new model: Homespun. Three primary components make up Homespun's

curriculum: (i) a focus on children's literature as well as extended discussion about the book and activities related to the story, (ii) opportunities for parents to explore ideas on encouraging an environment in the home that is conducive to literacy development through readings, discussion, videos, and instruction, and (iii) exploration and development of the parent's own literacy abilities, beliefs, and attitudes through personal journals, writing for children and discussing adult readings.

Homespun sessions run for 15 weeks, with evening or daytime workshops offered for 2 hours each week. There is an average of 10 parents in each workshop. In addition to regular classes, Homespun has a volunteer in-home programme for parents who can't come to class (Canadian Literacy Database 2000).

Parents as Tutors (PAT)

Parents as Tutors (PAT) is a partnership project between the Rainbow Literacy Society and the schools in the County of Vulcan #2. The objective of the project is to provide training and support to parents who are interested in helping their child become a better reader through a process known as Paired Reading.

PAT is available to families who have elementary school children in the County of Vulcan. A trained person from the community goes into the family's home five times a week for eight weeks. These sessions are fifteen minutes long, and are used to demonstrate Paired Reading. The trained community person is a non-teacher who acts as a liaison between the school and the family. This person's primary role is not to tutor the child, but to provide training and positive support to the parents as they develop skills as their child's tutor. In order to join the programme, parents must agree to participate in each of the Paired Reading Sessions, and to take over from the tutor before the end of the sixth week.

As you can see from the overview description of these five widely family literacy programmes there are no prescribed formulae in developing a family literacy programme. The character and curriculum are predominantly dictated by the needs of each community. (Canadian Literacy Database 2000).

Definition of concepts

In this study, by the term 'family' we mean any group of two or more people that considers itself a family: parents, children, siblings, foster parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and any others who consider themselves a family. The emotional tie is noted as a key ingredient

in the overall definition of a family, so the exact technical nature of the relationships among the various people is irrelevant, just as long as they consider themselves 'family' (Porritt 1995)

'Family literacy' refers to the ways families develop and use literacy skills to accomplish day-to-day tasks and activities. Examples of family literacy include writing a note to a child's teacher, sharing a bedtime story, making shopping lists, and using a recipe as well, adult reading and writing for different purposes at home, and literacy-related adult discussions typify family literacy, where adults may be literacy role models in the home.

'Family literacy programmes' refer to a broad spectrum of initiatives, which recognise the influence of the family on the literacy development of family members and try to support families in literacy activity and in accessing literacy resources.

Methodology

Research design

For the collection of data in the Soshanguve LVV, community survey research was used. For piloting of the family literacy programme, action research was used.

Population of the study and sampling

From the 488 Soshanguve LVV families we selected 70 families which had children between the ages of zero to six. In selecting these 70 families random sampling method was used (Research assistants would go into a house and ask whether there have children aging from zero to six years).

Data collection and analysis

Data from the Soshanguve LVV community were collected with a self-administered open-closed questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using scientific analysis methods.

Ethical considerations

The research was undertaken with dignity and respect. Questions were be asked by trained research assistants. The purpose of the research was explained to the respondents before the questions were posed. The data collected were kept confidential and not used for any other purpose except for this study.

Ensuring reliability and validity

Clear instructions were given on how the questionnaire should be completed. A pilot study was undertaken to make sure the data collected consisted of the desired information.

Data presentation, analysis and interpretation

Literacy/educational level of parents in Soshanguve LVV

In order to develop an effective family literacy programme for a specific community it is crucial to know more about the literacy/educational level of parents in that community. Consequently the first objective of the study was to get to know the educational level of the Soshanguve LVV community. In our endeavours in getting to know more about the literacy/educational level of the community of Soshanguve LVV; 70 parents were asked the following questions:

- What is the highest standard you reached?
- Do you read newspapers/magazines?
- If you read magazines/newspapers how often do you do so?
- Do you use the community library?

The first question was designed to gauge the literacy/education level of the parents. Questions 2, 3, 4 were designed to see if the parent was using her/his literacy (assuming she/he was literate).

Highest standard reached

Fifty-six parents interviewed reached secondary level and beyond; i.e. out of 70 parents interviewed, 50 had reached the secondary level and six had reached tertiary level. Only a small number of parents had never reached the secondary level; i.e. eight had primary schooling while six had never gone to school.

Magazines and newspapers

The ultimate aim of any literacy campaign is to enable people to function in society. The best ways of gauging the benefits of literacy skills is investigating people interested in reading magazines and newspapers. Newspapers and magazines provide their readers with current and informative news through its news, comments, sports business reports and leader pages designed to promote national culture.

In these set of questions, we wanted to know more about those parents who have basic literacy. The quest here was to see whether the parents were developing themselves through reading. Knowing how parents use their literacy skills would provide us with guidance when identifying a suitable literacy programme.

Of the 70 parents interviewed, 50 parents read newspapers and magazines while 20 parents did not. Nine parents read newspapers and magazines once a week, 18 parents read them 2-3 times a week, while 21 read newspapers and magazines 'as they are available'. The 22 parents

classed under 'not responded' include those who said they did not read magazines and newspapers in the previous questions.

One of the most important things that parents can teach their children is the love of reading and writing. The fact that parents can read newspapers and magazine is a good thing. The important thing is to enable parents share their reading experiences with their children so they can discover the joys and benefits of reading: new worlds, new ideas, fun and entertainment. In this way parents are able to transfer educational values to their children. By sharing what they read with their children parents are able to understand their children's world.

Number of parents using community libraries

One of the principal roles of a community library is to promote community literacy and the impartation of educational values to the community. Thus the community library if utilised to its ideal mission can be a key institution in the community's development.

A large number of the parents did not use the community library. Out of 70 parents only nine used the Library, while three did not respond to the question, and a total of 58 did not make use of the community library.

The high number of parents not using the library should not be attributed to parents' lack of interest in it, but rather be attributed to the fact that the community library is not making the community aware of its existence and service. There are no signposts or boards on the major corners and centres of the community as to where the library is situated. In addition, most of parents when asked about the use of the library said they are not aware that a library existed in the community.

Putting the findings together, we have a better idea of the literacy level of the parents. We can deduce from the findings that most parents are literate. The outstanding feature that comes out from these findings is that a high number of parents who reached secondary level correlate with the number of the parents reading newspapers and magazines.

Identify the level in which parents support the literacy development of their children at home

The second set of questionnaires was aimed at getting to know how parents interact with their children at home. The questions posed were:

- Do you watch TV/Radio with your children?
- What types of programmes do you watch with your children?
- Is your child asking questions when watching or listening to the programme?

We have already seen that the first few years of life, a child is very open to the environment. Like a sense organ, the little one is completely susceptible, open to any stimulation. This is the time for further development and maturation of the senses. Unlike adults, children are not able to filter out incoming stimulation. Any sense impressions experienced will be built into their sensitive organisms. Parents are their children's first teachers. The rationale in seeking answers to these questions is to see the manner in which parents influence their children's literacy development through TV/radio; whether for the positive development of their children's literacy development or to the detriment of their children's literacy. It is vital for us to have knowledge of this aspect if we are to provide a suitable intervention programme.

The results of the questionnaire were as follows: Of the 70 parents interviewed, 63 said they watch TV and/or radio while seven responded that they did not watch or listen to radio with their children. On the question on the types of programme they watched or listened to, 25 said they watched and listened to the TV and children educational programmes. The high number of parents watching TV with their children is a cause for concern noting the effects that television can have on the development of children. The negative effects of TV on children are varied and can be presented as follows:

- *Effects on sensory development:* By its very nature, TV is an impoverished sensory environment. In a recent study comparing TV viewing with laboratory simulated sensory deprivation, researchers found that 96 hours of laboratory induced sensory deprivation produced the same effects on the person as only a few minutes of TV viewing. Normal sensory experience is vital to maintaining a balanced state of mind and body. Therefore, children who are actively playing will have more opportunity to develop their senses than children passively viewing will.
- *Sight and Hearing:* While viewing, the eyes are practically motionless and 'defocused' in order to take in the whole screen. Excessive TV viewing, one of the most passive visual activities, can seriously impair a child's observational skills. Viewing affects not only eye mechanics, but also the ability to focus and pay attention. Since TV is more visual than auditory, children's sense of hearing is not being fully exercised. Active listening is a skill that needs to be developed. Children need practice in processing auditory stimulation, making their own mental pictures in response to what they hear. In addition, when a TV is constantly on, the sense of hearing may be dulled by the persistent background noise.

Effects on Creativity and Imagination: Boredom is the empty space necessary for creativity. With TV filling a child's leisure moments, the necessary void is never experienced. Furthermore, when children are bombarded with TV images, their own ability to form imaginative pictures becomes severely impaired. This process of generating internal pictures is critical to the development of dendrites and neural connectors, which lay the foundation for intelligence and creativity (Long and Buglion 1999).

Family Literacy Programme: Identification and implementation

Workshop with parents

A workshop with the parents of Soshanguve LVV community was conducted to explain to them the concept and benefits of family literacy programmes. Parents were also introduced to different kinds of family literacy programmes offered overseas. The aim of the workshop was to familiarise the parents with the objectives of the research and assist in the identification of a suitable family literacy programme.

The workshop, together with the results obtained from the survey, provided us with a better understanding of family literacy in the Soshanguve LVV community. The findings revealed that the majority of parents in Soshanguve LVV can read and write well enough to function effectively in society; and well enough to interact educationally with their children to impart lasting educational values. We saw that the majority of parents interviewed had attended school up to the secondary level, which indicated that they could read and understand. Another factor in the results was that parents read magazines and newspapers. With this knowledge, we could see that whatever programme we might suggest for the development of family literacy in the community should take note that parents can read and write. This served us a premise to decide on the type of a suitable family literacy programme.

Identifying literacy programme

In the light of the findings of survey, we conceptualised a community family literacy programme called the Soshanguve Family Literacy Services. Soshanguve Family Literacy Services is a community based family literacy service that delivers comprehensive family literacy services to the Soshanguve LVV community. It recognises that the education of children and parents is interdependent. Therefore, it provides for the needs and goals of the adult leaders of the family, helping them to acquire new educational, social, and entrepreneurial skills. Adults are able to enhance their own literacy skills while promoting literacy with their children. The

family literacy programme has been designed for those most in need of these service in the community. Therefore, most participants cae from the following populations: (i) teen parents, (ii) single mothers, (iii) undereducated parents, (iv) and (v) fathers.

Structure of the Soshanguve family literacy project

In each programme session, the following literacy categories are covered:

- (i) Financial literacy: In this workshop, the subjects of credit control, budgeting and frugal living are dealt with. Frugal tips and ideas to get more for your dollar, save money, and have more for less. Being frugal is not just about saving money, it is a way of life.
- (ii) Childhood Education: In this workshop, parents are engaged in their children's educational programmes in order foster involvement that will be maintained throughout the child's educational career.
- (iii) Parent Education: This is an interactive workshop forms the core of the entire programme. It consists of a lively interaction and discussion with instructions on how children grow, develop, and learn. It addresses issues critical to family well-being, connects parents with community resources, and provides opportunities for parents to network and develop mutual support systems.

Complementing the residential program is the monthly *Parenting Bulletin* for parents of the Soshanguve LLV community. The reason for the creation of this kind of Bulletin is that since our research found that parents read magazines and newspapers, then it would be logical to assume that they could read a parenting journal, which guides them further in raising their children.

Copies of *Parenting Bulletin* are hand-delivered free to families in Soshanguve LVV community to study in their own time, in the comfort of their homes. Parents can put the advice contained in *Parenting Bulletin* to immediate use and help develop their children for success in life. This is the kind of advice offered. Every month *Parenting Bulletin* offers its subscribers a number of practical plans on three main topics:

- (i) Parenting Education: Parents learn about their child's developmental stages and strategies to support their children's education at home and in the school;
- (ii) Childhood Education: Scientific early learning activities are presented;
- (iii) Parent and Child Time Together: Information on how parents can best utilise the time they have with their children. This is a crucial time where the parent can consciously transfer educational habits

in the home. This is the time when a learning partnership between parents and their children is strengthened.

Feedback and recommendation

The *Bulletin* has been well received in the Soshanguve LVV community. On our third issue in May 2002, parents were asked how they valued Parenting Bulletin. All parents said that the bulletin was educationally helpful. Since the comments we received were numerous we have selected few of them for presentation:

Through the Parenting Bulletin I have learned that helping my children understand that there are consequences for every action whether it be a positive or negative consequence helps us in our home.

Interesting and at a time when I really need it. My husband and I are having trouble with our six year old and through the Parenting Bulletin we are trying to solve it.

...You are a very good person to help others and render your services and advice. We are really appreciate your self sacrifice for providing us with this information. I hope that it shall be continued forever. It's my prayer that the Lord will bless you and reward you abundantly.

We have enjoyed your Parenting Bulletin. I am always waiting the end of the month to get new issue, it makes a lot of sense.

I enjoyed reading the May issue...I liked it... I think you really hit us where it hurts. Let's all tear ourselves away from watching TV and interact with our kids!

Parenting Bulletin help lies in the ability to teach the general public that the impossible is possible... I am presently using the skills I learned for myself and my children.

Some parents from other areas of Soshanguve have read the Bulletin and feel strongly that the journal should cover the whole Soshanguve. They find it unfair that only Soshanguve LVV is benefiting and not the whole of Soshanguve. It is recommended that the local government should consider supporting the *Bulletin* so that it can cover the whole Soshanguve.

Conclusion

Community family literacy initiatives work for many reasons. Parents become active participants in their children's education and are better prepared to take the role as their children's first teachers. Parents are able to share challenges and to support one another. Parents have the chance to reach their educational goals and gain valuable skills needed for job opportunities. Parents learn to blend work and educational activities. Children, growing under educationally empowered parents become better prepared to be successful students as they continue their education. Families grow together

through learning and shared experiences. The programme builds upon family strengths and strengthens the mother-child bond.

A truly integrated approach to literacy cannot just teach adults to read. It must be equally devoted to raising children who are enthusiastic, regular readers. Family literacy programmes are about community empowerment, support and hope. Once parents realise their role as children's important teachers, and are made to realise the importance and value of education, the impact on the children is enormous (Minnis 2001).

We have gone a long way in our quest in finding the suitable family literacy programme for the literacy development of the Soshanguve community. We have seen that a family literacy programme, if designed appropriately, helps illiterate parents create an educational environment at home, an environment necessary for the development of better citizens. We looked into different types of family literacy programmes, which gave us a better understanding of how they are created and structured. We also saw that, though there are no rigid rules in the creation of such programmes they have three aspects in common: parent education, child education, and parent-child together. In designing the family literacy programme in Soshanguve LVV we were restricted to the educational standards of parents and their conditions so the programme we designed was ultimately well received by the community.

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