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‘Family literacy: some research issues’

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Coverage

Based mainly on the key references on the handout, especially Brooks & Hannon (2012)

Focused mainly on research issues

Family literacy programmes work with parents and their children to improve the literacy skills of both, and parents' ability to help their children's development. On occasions other family members, such as grandparents, brothers and sisters, may be involved

Formerly known (in English) as 'Learning at mother's knee' – see next slide

Quentin Massys, Madonna and Child, Flemish, 15th century



Pioneers

- The first family literacy programmes began in Turkey in 1983 & the USA in the mid 1980s
- The first programmes called 'family literacy' in Britain began in 1994, and thrived for many years, but are now a shadow of their former selves because of government's financial cuts

An intergenerational cycle?

2 studies in Britain (ALBSU 1993; Bynner & Parsons 2006) found that children of parents who reported having literacy difficulties were around twice as likely as others to be in the lowest quartile nationally on reading test scores

But Hannon (2000) re-analysed the 1993 data & found that most of the children with poor reading did not have parents with poor literacy

But it may still be valid to concentrate on families in disadvantaged areas

Quantitative evidence ...

... summarised in Brooks *et al.* (2008) comes from Britain, Canada, Germany, Nepal, New Zealand, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda, the USA, and the PEFaL (Parent Empowerment through Family Literacy) initiative led by Malta which also involved Belgium, England, Italy, Lithuania and Romania

JD Carpentieri and Roel van Steensel have both led comprehensive analyses of the research evidence

Benefits for children's literacy reported from test data

- At least 13 studies
- 7 studies gathered follow-up data; almost all showed benefits had been sustained
- Longest-running evaluation: MoCEP in Turkey. When followed up at age 25, young people whose mothers had been in the programme 19 years earlier were more likely to have graduated from university than those in the control group

Benefits for parents

- Benefit to parents' literacy was reported from test data in 4 one-group studies
- **but** 2 others reported no benefit over control groups
- So evidence of benefits to parents' skills is very thin
- However, many more studies reported benefit to parents' ability to help their children's development and/or wider benefits for parents (e.g. further study)

Research issues

No quantitative studies have yet been carried out into whether:

- parents in family literacy programmes make better progress than they would in stand-alone adult literacy programmes
- children in family literacy programmes make better progress than they would in other forms of pre-school provision
- some approaches to family literacy are more successful than others

Research issues

- Fathers are relatively absent in family literacy. One notable exception is the father education programme in Turkey (Koçak 2004)
- Are family literacy programmes adapting to the digital age?



Mille grazie!