
Parent Involvement in Reading

Editor: Laurie Elish-Piper

About This Column

Parents play a key role in their children's literacy development and school success. To support educators in building positive working relationships with their students' parents, this column offers practical suggestions to promote parent communication, involvement, and partnerships.

Creating Parent Libraries: Enhancing Family Literacy Through Access to Books

Guest Authors: Margaret Mary Policastro, Diane K. Mazeski, and Becky McTague

Imagine walking into a school and the first thing you see is an inviting parent library where books are displayed and celebrated. This would be a place where parents can check out children's books or read a book and find information about family literacy.

It has been our goal to assist reading specialists and literacy coaches to develop and create such parent libraries within the schools and districts where they work. The last several years have provided an outstanding opportunity for us to work in a large urban public school district. Most recently, we have focused our attention and efforts on understanding and creating a structure or framework for access to books for parents through designing and implementing parent libraries. This critical and essential access to books requires a confluence of ideas that bridges libraries within a school

and provides access to books for families and caregivers.

Thus, the notions and ideas of family literacy permeate throughout our work and efforts. Family literacy is based on the idea that parents and children learn best when learning together and, through this process, both parents and children develop essential skills. Furthermore, this approach to literacy has been identified as a potential strategy for ameliorating the challenges of low levels of literacy and poverty (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). The purpose of this column is to introduce the idea of developing and creating parent libraries and to provide descriptions, elements, photographs, references, and a checklist. Further, we showcase several parent libraries—one recently created and another that has long been in existence as an exemplar model.

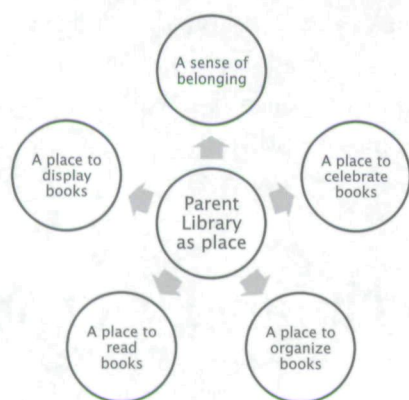
Creating a Sense of Place

Parent libraries can create a sense of place for families to access books and materials to check out and take home. Creating an inviting, comfortable place where books are housed and celebrated is an important message to convey. A parent library can and should evoke a special feeling for parents as a place where they can go and be around books—a place where they can enjoy books and become inspired to read. Creating this sense of place with a welcoming style through books enhances the school entryway. With just a bookcase, the school

entrance way can be transformed into an invitation to books and learning. A parent library can be a place they can count on time and again to find the comfort of children's books and parenting information. This approach to parent libraries as place is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Parent Library as Place



The photograph in Figure 2 illustrates how a parent library can be created to invite users. This parent library is located inside the entrance to Nathaniel Davis School in Chicago, Illinois. The school office is just steps away. The pre-school and kindergarten classrooms are located in this hallway as well. Parents who come to drop off or pick up their children at school have easy access to the parent library.

Figure 2



Attention to Details

Attention to details can bring the parent library to life, inviting the user to be drawn in and indulge in the books. A charming touch in this library is the bench between the two bookshelves with a seat cover that opens for inside storage of materials. Baskets placed on shelves to hold the collection and whimsical touches of flowers and leaves for the inspired seasonal motif all contribute to a cozy sense of place. Materials in this library are organized in plastic baskets. The bookshelf on the left is filled with baskets of picture books, read-alouds, and a good assortment of bedtime stories. The card catalog for honor system checkout is located on the second shelf on the left. The second shelf on the right holds books on tapes in plastic ziplock bags. Tape recorders are available for checkout in this library as well. The bottom two shelves hold baskets of free parent resources such as information on getting your child ready for school, reading tips, helping your child with homework, and activities to promote literacy in the home.

Key Parent Library Elements

Creating and building parent libraries requires some consideration of essential elements: access, collection, and management. Since access to books is a critical dimension in literacy success for all children, the framework begins with the notion of access as a central theme. Access here refers to the ease with which one can use the library, making it easy for parents, caregivers, and children to have readily available books. When parents have access to books, they are more readily able to provide books at home for bedtime story reading and family reading time. Classroom teachers can encourage the use of the library through newsletters, announcements, and conferences. Administrators can encourage the circulation of materials from the parent library when parents attend special meetings and pick their children up from school. Often there

is a concern about circulation and if books will get returned by the users. Our work indicates that parents do bring books back and check out new ones on a regular basis. When a card file box is placed in the parent library, books can be signed out through this easy process. In our experience, having parents write their name, the date, and the book title has worked well in this honor style checkout system.

Collection refers to the range and variety of genres along with quantity and quality of books. How new editions are selected and added is key. The parent library collection should include a range of picture books, easy-to-read books, bed-time story collections, dual language books if needed, and information on parenting and family literacy. Award-winning books, such as Caldecott, Newbery, and Jane Addams award winners, add a special touch of excellence to the collection. The collection should reflect the needs of the community as well. Our work has been primarily in schools where the native language of the parents is not English. Thus, an emphasis on English Language Learners has been important in the development of the parent libraries and the collections. It is important that the collection represents the languages of the parent users. Additionally, all directions for checking out the collection as well as labels should also be in the languages of the parents. Organization of the collection does not need to be by ages and grades; rather, a continuum of literacy development that is parent user friendly works well. The continuum could include books for babies, toddlers, preschoolers, books to help develop reading skills, chapter books, nonfiction, and an array of fiction to encourage independent reading.

Management focuses on how books circulate for the users. Ordering of new books along with the visual display and arrangement are also key elements. Caring for the collection is also an important aspect to the management of the library. Keeping it neat and visually appealing to invite users is part of the management and is the responsibility of the persons who maintain

the library. Discarding and weeding out books that are outdated, worn, etc., must also be considered when managing a parent library.

These three key elements are seen as an overlapping process due to the nature of parent libraries. For example, when planning where a library will be located, it is important to consider the size of the collection and how books will circulate. When considering who will be using the library, it is important to take into account how easy it is to access the location. The time of day and hours for usage are essential to consider as well when serving the possible school audience. These elements and their interactions are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Key Library Elements



- **ACCESS:** location, user friendly, inviting
- **COLLECTION:** genres, quantity, quality, new editions
- **MANAGEMENT:** circulation, order, appearance

A Model Parent Library

The parent library at Emilio Zapata Academy located in the Little Village community in Chicago, Illinois, has been in existence for many years and has served as an exemplar model and demonstration for other schools. The main school office is to the right of the entrance. The photo in Figure 4 shows the bookcases that house the collection. The bookcases for this library were donated by a parent, and they fit right along the wall and are in perfect view from the main office where the circulation box is kept. Parents

can sign their name, date, and book title on an index card and leave it in the office, making this a very user-friendly environment for the parents. The collection is managed and maintained by the school's literacy coordinator and the head office clerk. The collection has been funded through No Child Left Behind, Scholastic Book Fairs, and an annual investment by the principal who is committed to getting books in students' homes. This parent library is welcoming and invites the community of parents to browse the collection of materials and books. Books are placed in clear bins and ziplock bags for easy checkout and circulation. The collection is organized around an array of books that can be read aloud at home. This collection has a dual language component with audiotapes to meet the needs of the parent community. Special parent workshops have been provided in Spanish and English to introduce information about reading aloud to children at home and the concept of bedtime stories as well.

Figure 4



Free Parent Library Resources

The following website has free information, such as the items listed below, that educators can order in bulk for parent libraries: www.edpubs.gov.

- *Dad's Playbook: Coaching Kids to Read* (2006)
- *Shining Stars: Toddlers Get Ready to Read: How Parents Can Help Their Toddlers Get Ready to Read* (2007)

- *Shining Stars: Preschoolers Get Ready to Read: How Parents Can Help Their Preschoolers Get Ready to Read* (2007)
- *Shining Stars: Kindergartners Learn to Read: How Parents Can Help Their Children Learn to Read* (2006)
- *Literacy Begins at Home: Teach Them to Read* (2007)

These websites provide useful information to share with parents:

- National Center for Family Literacy – www.famlit.org
Free online parent resources, including a literacy calendar, parent magazine, tips to grow reading at home, and much more
- National Institute for Literacy – www.nifl.gov
Free online resources for parents regarding all aspects of literacy
- American Library Association – www.ala.org
Information on everything about libraries: news, events, and book awards
- I Love Libraries – www.ilovelibraries.org
An online resource dedicated to library advocacy, book clubs, book reviews, and promotional materials about libraries

The Parent Library as an Investment

Providing access to books for families and caregivers is the ultimate goal of creating a parent library. It is an investment in family literacy. The parent library can welcome parents and children into a school and serve as an inviting sense of place to celebrate books. We hope that the work described here and the framework which includes access, collection, and management along with the examples provide you with the information necessary to develop and create a parent library in your own school. Finally, "The Parent Library: Checklist" (see Figure 5) is included to assist in the planning and development of the library.

Figure 5. The Parent Library: A Checklist

Key Library Elements	A Checklist
Access	<input type="checkbox"/> Location near an entrance <input type="checkbox"/> Parents have easy access <input type="checkbox"/> Before, during, and after school <input type="checkbox"/> User friendly and inviting for the parent community <input type="checkbox"/> Days and times posted
Collection	<input type="checkbox"/> Picture books, with some hardback books <input type="checkbox"/> Bedtime story books <input type="checkbox"/> Easy to read books <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter books <input type="checkbox"/> Award-winning collections <input type="checkbox"/> Dual language collection <input type="checkbox"/> Books on DVD <input type="checkbox"/> Parent resources <input type="checkbox"/> Accent details, baskets, bins, etc.
Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Card file for checkout/check-in <input type="checkbox"/> Visual display and arrangement <input type="checkbox"/> Upkeep and update of materials <input type="checkbox"/> Ordering parent information <input type="checkbox"/> Change themes and motif <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate circulation hours

Reference

National Early Literacy Panel. (2008). *Developing early literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

About the Editor

Laurie Elish-Piper is a Presidential Teaching Professor and Reading Clinic director in the Department of Literacy Education at Northern Illinois University. Prior to her current position, Laurie worked as an elementary and middle school teacher and an educational therapist in a clinical setting. Laurie's research, publications, and presentations focus on family literacy, parent involvement, reading strategies, struggling readers, and literacy assessment.

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