



Literacy Development Begins in the Home: How to Connect Home Literacy Practices to School Literacy Practices

Literacy development begins early in the home. There is not one definition for literacy nor is there one way in which families can and should do literacy at home. According to Barton and Hamilton (2005), “literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p.7). Literacy is all around you and always present in your daily experiences. Here are some ways to connect a few common home literacy practices to school literacy practices.

1. Storytelling

Storytelling is a great way for your children to build their oral language and listening skills. Tell stories often and invite your child to tell their own stories. If there is a story that has been passed down in your family, be sure to introduce who in the family is the original author. For example, “This is a story that has been told in our family for many years and my aunt told it to me.”

2. Photographs

Like storytelling, photographs are a great example of a home literacy practice. Look at family photographs with your child and tell a story about the photograph or the people in the photograph. Let your child tell you stories based on photographs in your home. If you have a photo album, treat it like a book and read from it before bedtime.

3. Cooking

There are many literacy practices involved in cooking such as reading from a recipe book. If you are using a recipe book, allow your child to see you using the book. Point as you read the labels on food. Your child will begin to see the connection that books and other printed materials can provide information. If it is a recipe that has been passed down your family, introduce the family member who taught you the recipe. You can write a recipe book as a family, even the youngest family member can illustrate the pages. Talking about steps in a recipe (e.g. first, next, last) also introduces the skill of sequencing.

4. Social Media

Many families stay connected through digital platforms (Facebook, email, etc.). Allow your child to see you using this as means to communicate. Read family emails or Facebook messages to your child so he/she begins to see that print conveys meaning. If possible, allow him/her to play with the keyboard and notice letters in the alphabet.

5. Digital Literacy

Many families use the Internet to find information. For example, you may search the web to find a plumber or look up how to fix a broken appliance. Involve your children in

the process. Allow them to see you using a search engine, typing in key words, and searching through the results to find an answer. As you are doing this, talk to your child about what you are doing and why. This process requires many of the thinking skills that children will encounter in school.

6. Poetry, Spoken Word, and Music

Literacy is abundant in these creative ways of self-expression. Engage your child in all creative expressions and encourage them to create their own. For example, if you sing from a hymnbook at a religious event, point to the words so that your child can begin to make the connection that songs have printed words and that music notes convey meaning. Singing songs, especially songs with rhymes, helps children develop their phonological awareness which will transfer into phonics skills when they enter school.

7. Daily Scheduling

There are many benefits to talking about or writing out your daily schedule. Talking about the daily schedule introduces children to the skill of sequencing (e.g. first, next, last) as well as some of the grammar they will encounter in school (e.g. in the morning, in the afternoon). You can introduce days of the week by discussing what your family does on different days.

Source: Written for Reading Is Fundamental by Erin Bailey, MA using following reference(s): Hamilton, M., & Barton, D. (2005). Literacy practices. In *Situated literacies* (pp. 25-32). Routledge.

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