FAMILIES, SCHOOL AND LITERACY: A PARTNERSHIP FOR EMERGENT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

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Research, since the 90s. has highlighted the value of family literacy in the development of literacy knowledge and skills among preschool and elementary children. Research also emphasized the benefits that occur when school recognizes family literacy practices and mobilizes them in a strategic way to promote students’ literacy development (Purcell-Gates, 2004; Cairney, 2002). Family literacy practices are diverse and families vary in frequency, types of practices and also in the way they involve their children (Nutbrown, Hannon & Mogan, 2005). Even among families with similar socioeconomic status, diversity is present, because parents use literacy in different ways, functions and aims (Mata, 2006; Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2010).

The research we developed was conducted with 195 parents and their preschool age children. Our aim was to identify the frequency of three types of family literacy practice: entertainment, teaching and utilitarian practices. We also pretended to identify associations between these literacy practices and children’s emergent literacy knowledge.

With parents we used a questionnaire to characterize family literacy and with children we used two instruments, one to identify their knowledge about literacy functions and another to identify their level of conceptualizations about literacy (invented spelling). Results confirm diversity among families when concerning their literacy practices: teaching practices were those developed more frequently, but some parents don’t use them; some families usually involve their children in utilitarian practices (e.g. reading letters, bills) and/or in entertainment practices (e.g. story reading, crosswords, words’ games) and others don’t. Global significant correlations were verified between family literacy practices and emergent literacy knowledge. To clarify and understand these associations more deeply we considered three different types of families: (1) High Practices - High frequency of entertainment and utilitarian literacy practices; (2) High Teaching – Only teaching practices were developed with frequency; (3) Low Practices – the three types occured with low frequency. Using an ANOVA (for functions knowledge) and Kruskal-Wallis (for invented spelling levels) we verified significant differences in emergent literacy knowledge of children from these three groups of families. Differences were identified not only in their knowledge of literacy functions but also in their conceptualizations about written language, with children from ‘High Practices’ families having better results than the others.

These results emphasize the importance of informal family literacy practices in the development of literacy. Therefore we will discuss them considering the necessity of a family/school partnership valuing not only school literacy practices but also family literacy practices as an important means to promote literacy development.
Keywords:
Family literacy; Emergent literacy

References:


