Chapter 7

Promoting Kindergarten Readiness During Remote Learning Through Community–Based Family Literacy Sessions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to describe a series of community-based family literacy sessions and the responsive strategies used to modify the sessions for remote instruction to meet the needs of caregivers of young children (birth to age 3). Situated within a two-generation approach to family engagement, the sessions were implemented through a family-school-community partnership with a university-based early learning research center, early learning centers in two urban Title I schools, and a public library. Session attendees included a sample of 44 racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse families. In addition to describing the family literacy program, the chapter highlights the ways in which family literacy sessions can positively influence the home literacy environment of families who participate in sessions regularly. The chapter concludes with recommendations for facilitators aiming to work collaboratively with community partners and families to develop mutually beneficial family literacy initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

One by one, small boxes with caregivers and young children populate the shared Zoom screen that already includes the session facilitators. As children notice themselves on the screen, they start smiling

and making silly faces. The center director, Ms. Greene, greets families as they join the virtual family literacy session.

Ms. Greene: ¡Hola, Miguel!

Miguel: ¡Hola, Señora Greene!

She continues to greet families as they join by acknowledging those that appear on the screen at the time. For the first few minutes, the screen of some families moves from place to place as they settle into different locations within their homes for the session. One family sits on the couch, another at the kitchen table, and another on the floor. One mom paces back and forth in the background with her infant child as her daughter makes faces in the camera. One family's connection is interrupted and is seen rejoining after a few minutes.

The university-based center director introduces herself and asks members of the three program partners to wave when their organization is called. She then turns over the session to the center director, Ms. Greene, to facilitate family introductions.

Ms. Greene: "Did everyone receive their materials?"

Ms. Hernández: "¿Todos recibieron sus materiales?"

Immediately, some children move off screen, while others receive a book or materials from a caregiver. Children, with support, put their book or materials up to the camera for all to see.

Ms. Greene: "Excellent! I'm so happy you received them. We'll get to those in just a bit, but first, let's do some introductions and say hello to everyone."

Ms. Greene pauses to give Ms. Hernandez, the school's family services coordinator, a chance to translate the requests, and then calls on caregivers to introduce themselves and their children. Some caregivers that are off screen take the device to face themselves and introduce themselves briefly before turning the phone, computer, or tablet back to their child. Some families turn on their device's camera feature for their introduction and return off-camera once finished. During the remainder of the family introductions, some children can be seen turning the pages of a book or playing with the session materials, and one child naps on his mother's chest.

This vignette provides a snapshot of the first virtual family literacy session during the year at home. These sessions, which during a typical school year were held in community centers and public libraries with ample support staff, took place in families' homes as they cared for their children. As schools considered the best format for instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic closures of 2020 (e.g., synchronous online learning, independent instructional materials and resources), the vignette illustrates how families became increasingly involved in their children's learning experiences. A similar shift took place in early learning centers that were already working closely with families to promote positive child development through caregiver programming and playgroups. While recent research efforts have attempted to capture the

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