1996

Literacy & Learning in Families and Communities

Joan Dixon

Joanie Cohen

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Action-Learning Manual
A Guide for Literacy Practitioners

by

Joan Dixon and Joanie Cohen
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in Families and Communities
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The Literacy Linkage Program
The Center for International Education
Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development
Foreword

This is one of the core manuals in a series of Action-Learning Manuals developed to assist community-based practitioners to expand their knowledge of the theory and practice of adult literacy and nonformal education. The purpose of the series is to assist practitioners to develop literacy activities and materials based on local needs, interests and resources.

The series offers the practitioner a wide variety of activities to choose from to meet the diverse needs of community literacy groups. The manuals are designed to complement each other, but can also be used independently. Two of the manuals, Whole Language: An Integrated Approach to Reading and Writing, and Literacy and Learning in Families and Communities, provide the core concepts for literacy learning. The other five manuals provide creative ideas and techniques for implementing those concepts. It is not imperative that Whole Language be read before a practitioner attempts to implement ideas found in the Role Play manual, for example, but it might be helpful.

The activities and information in this manual were developed by Joan Dixon and Joanie Cohen. Keshab Thapaliya shared his insightful documentation and stories of family literacy in Nepal as well as information on making and using kinship charts. Hassan Ali Muhammed shared information on using local knowledge. Gail Weinstein-Shr provided insights into the broader issues of family literacy during the early conceptualization of this manual. Elsa Auerbach provided inspiration with her early work in family literacy as well as insightful suggestions and feedback for making major revisions to the first version of this manual.

The activities and strategies have been developed and tested in a number of settings. Participants at the 1992 Summer Institute for Literacy Professionals worked with us on designing a strategy for applying the concept of family literacy in a variety of cultural situations. The activities were first tried in Massachusetts with family literacy programs in Amherst and Holyoke. This was helpful to our conceptual understanding of learning and literacy in many different kinds of families.

The LLP Team in Nepal organized workshops and sharing groups on family literacy to field test activities. Special thanks to Urmila Aryal and Usha Satyal for trying out the family diagrams and kinship charts with families in Nepal and sending written descriptions of what they learned. In addition, the Women's Program of ACOGIPRI in El Salvador was also a field test site for many of these activities and provided important information for their use in varying cultural contexts with people of different physical and educational abilities.

The Action-Learning Series was developed by the Literacy Linkage Program--a collaboration between the Center for International Education at the School of Education, University of Massachusetts and the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) at Tribhuvan University in Nepal. Send correspondence to:

Literacy Linkage Program  Literacy Linkage Program
Center for International Education Research Centre for Educational Innovation
285 Hills House South  & Development (CERID)
University of Massachusetts  P.O. Box 2161
Amherst, MA 01003  Tripureshwar
USA

fax: 413-545-1263  fax: 977-1-226639
tel: 413-545-0747  tel: 977-1-215647

e-mail: cie@educ.umass.edu
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Introduction

**HOW TO USE THIS ACTION-LEARNING MANUAL**

This manual is designed for practitioners working in community-based organizations. The specific focus is literacy, but it is relevant for anyone involved in nonformal education, women and development, family and community health, early childhood education, community development or other community and family-centered projects. It can also be adapted for programs that want to improve communication and understanding between families and organizations such as schools, health clinics or other service institutions.

The purpose of the manual is to provide guidance to practitioners who want to develop a literacy program based on local information, interests and realities. The manual promotes a three-pronged Action-Learning Process for program development. The process includes researching the local situation (inquiry), developing reading and writing skills for daily life situations (learning), and organizing family and community groups to participate in the process (organizing).

The manual also introduces seven family and community literacy activities and describes how they can be used as tools to implement this three-pronged approach. 1) As inquiry tools the activities help you observe, ask questions and collect information about family and community literacy in a systematic way. 2) As learning tools, the activities can be used to develop reading and writing skills and to raise awareness about literacy and local knowledge. 3) As organizing tools, the activities can help you organize and promote literacy and learning in family-based and community-based settings.

The manual is divided into two parts. **Section One: The Action-Learning Process** explains the three-pronged approach and introduces the strategies for action-learning: inquiry, learning and organizing. It explains the basic components of doing small scale research, developing participatory learning plans and organizing home-based and community-based literacy activities. **Section Two: The Action-Learning Activities**, describes each of the seven action-learning activities and provides information about their purpose, procedure and applications.

We expect that each person will use this manual differently. The activities are designed to help you draw out and organize information about people, families, communities, institutions, language and learning that is only available in the community where you work. The information that comes out of doing the activities will help you define and create family and community literacy for your specific purposes.

To use this manual most effectively, we recommend that you study Section One carefully to understand how to use the activities as inquiry, learning and organizing tools. Then you can review the activities in Section Two and select the ones that are most relevant to your program and community situation. You can also create your own learning activities modeled on the activities, concepts and approaches presented here.
LITERACY AND LEARNING IN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Family literacy and other types of literacy education have become popular solutions for all sorts of problems facing people in the world today. But many literacy programs are being started without stopping to consider exactly what is meant by the term literacy and how people actually use reading and writing skills in the daily life context of their families and communities.

This action-learning manual invites you to explore the meaning and uses of literacy in daily life. When you step outside the narrow confines of the classroom, you will discover that some of the most interesting and practical uses of reading and writing are often overlooked in literacy education. Furthermore, you will also discover that literacy is more than recognizing words and decoding written messages. Literacy is a form of human communication that is best understood in the context where it is used.

Reading and writing activities take place in homes and communities. The local culture and the relationships between people have a profound impact on all aspects of learning as well as all aspects of literacy. Therefore, it is important for literacy practitioners (trainers, program directors, teachers, facilitators, and volunteer tutors) to know how to observe and analyze the uses of and needs for literacy in the communities where they work. Furthermore, it is important for literacy learners to understand the many possible ways that they can use their new literacy skills in their homes and communities to improve communication and understanding.

WHAT IS FAMILY LITERACY?

The phrase, family literacy, describes the role literacy plays in family life both at home and in the community. Many people assume that family literacy focuses on teaching young children and preparing them for school. But children are not the only ones who need literacy skills and schools are not the only place where reading and writing are used. Therefore, to understand family literacy, we must look at how every family member uses (or needs to use) reading and writing to accomplish everyday tasks. Family literacy also prompts us to look at the outside influences of a literate society as well as the impact of literacy on the family.

Family groups have survived for ages by teaching each other through word of mouth, the oral tradition, and by working together. So why is family literacy a new concern? Why are reading and writing now necessary for families to get along in daily life? If we examine what is happening within and around families, we begin to see how written documents play an increasingly important role in daily life. In our changing world, it is important to look at the impact literacy has on family and community life.

Family life everywhere is affected by print and literacy. Even the most remote rural areas are affected by printed documents. People may never read the laws of their country, but their lives are shaped or influenced by those legal documents. Tax forms, licenses and other government documents directly touch on daily life activities. Written calendars as well as natural seasons are connected to the cycle of festivals and holidays. Holy books, horoscopes and written prayers are a part of religious life.
Daily life requires literacy skills in many forms. Children bring home books from school and written communications from their teachers. Parents may be expected to help their children with homework. Health clinics require parents to keep track of their children's health records. Instructions for medicines are often written on the bottle or packet. In farming, pesticides and fertilizers have critical safety information written on the containers. Being able to read can mean saving a life. More and more messages of modern society are being written rather than spoken. Family members need to be able to help and teach each other in order to survive in a changing world.

Family literacy is an important concept because the formal content of modern schools often ignores and even undermines the learning that takes place in the home and local community. For example, history lessons focus on national heroes and events and may give prominence to certain ethnic or majority groups and ignore others. Family literacy encourages children to talk to elders and write family histories which focus on the activities and dedication of ancestors that shaped their family's traditions and beliefs. The language used in school is often not the same as the language used at home. Family literacy encourages family members to write for themselves and each other in their own language.

**What is Community Literacy?**

The word community is used to describe many different groupings of people. A community can be as large as a town or can be as small as the group of people in a literacy classroom. The important aspect of community is that it implies that people are working together to build a cooperative living environment. Community literacy describes the kinds of reading, writing and analyzing skills that people and organizations need in a community in order to communicate with each other and meet the needs of daily life. Community literacy includes local knowledge and community traditions as well as the many forms of printed and written materials such as letters, bills, land deeds, prescriptions for medicine, certificates, tax forms, stamps, and all of the forms and regulations of government bureaucracies that impact on daily life. In any community there are different organizations that provide services to people. As family members interact with these organizations, they increasingly need literacy skills.

Family literacy activities examine the role literacy plays in the family's day-to-day activities at home and in the community. What written materials are present? Who can read and write? What new skills do family members need now and in the future? Since a great deal of learning takes place in the family, literacy development can become a natural part of the teaching-learning process. Family members can help each other increase the use of literacy in their immediate environment. Family literacy programs strive to introduce literacy skills that follow three principles:

1. Promote positive relationships within families.
2. Enable family members to have positive interactions with community institutions and to gain access to community resources.
3. Promote positive opportunities for growth for all family members regardless of age, gender or ability.
The seven activities in this manual are tools to help you examine the uses of literacy and learning in family and community situations. From the insights you gain from doing the various activities with a group of learners in your community, you will figure out new ways to design and organize literacy learning experiences for your program.
Section One: The Action-Learning Process

The basic principles of adult education state that the information contained in literacy materials must be directly related to the learners' lives in order to be effective. In spite of this knowledge, many programs continue to rely on published books containing information that has been determined by outside experts. If programs seriously want to teach literacy using information that is directly drawn from the learners' lives, then the learners and facilitators need to develop skills to analyze their own learning needs and interests. They cannot rely on outside experts to do the research for them and tell them what they need to learn; they must do the research themselves and design their own programs.

When a group of people do their own research in order to improve the situation in their community, it is called participatory action research. The name refers to a process where research, planning, and action are used to analyze local problems and their connection to larger social and political structures in order to bring about positive social change. The action-learning activities are designed to involve a group of learners or family members in a participatory process where they learn together by pooling their own knowledge and by seeking additional information. The action component of the process is based on what they decide to do with the information they collect. To develop a family or community-based literacy program, local facilitators and learners need to incorporate elements of participatory action research into their teaching and learning process.

Participatory curriculum development is a process where the facilitator asks the learners what they are interested in learning. The facilitator designs learning activities that help the learners study the topic while learning reading and writing skills. The learners are involved as partners in collecting and organizing the information. They create many of their own reading materials by writing about the things they discuss. The learners are also involved in making decisions about what to learn and in evaluating their own progress through using self-assessment tools.

Action-learning combines elements of both participatory action research and participatory curriculum development to help literacy practitioners and learners work together to understand their local situation and to design their own literacy materials and learning activities. The Action-learning Process includes three strategies:

- inquiry - finding out information
- learning - developing new literacy skills
- organizing - using the skills and information to plan and carry out action

The next section introduces each of these strategies and provides guidelines for blending them together to create a dynamic literacy learning program.
USING THE ACTION-LEARNING ACTIVITIES AS TOOLS FOR INQUIRY

One of the basic reasons why we need reading and writing skills in our daily lives is so that we can collect and organize information about the world around us. Literacy is not merely knowing how to read information written by experts. Learning is not limited to information that comes from books. There is a great deal of information and knowledge waiting to be collected, discussed, organized, analyzed and written down in every family, community and environment. Effective literacy activities invite learners to ask and answer questions, to collect information from many sources, to discuss the meaning of what they have found and to write about what they have learned. This is the basis of inquiry - identifying problems or topics to study, collecting information, and analyzing and documenting what was found.

The action-learning activities in this manual focus on finding out important information about learning and using literacy in families and communities. You will try to answer questions such as: Who does the reading and writing? What literacy materials are available? How are changes in the literate world impacting families where adults can’t read and write? What happens inside a family when the children are literate and have access to information that the parents don’t have? You will look at family literacy from two perspectives — the family and the community — and identify your own topics for inquiry. You can also adapt the learning activities and inquiry process to learn about many other topics that are not directly related to literacy education.

Inquiry is a less formal way to do research. The word, research, can sound intimidating because it is usually associated with universities and scientists. However, you have probably done a great deal of informal research in your life without calling it research. Research can simply mean systematically collecting, organizing and analyzing information that is around you every day. We use the term inquiry to describe a kind of small scale, practical research that provides information for local analysis and use. It does not always need to be formally structured. It can be an attitude of looking at ordinary events with new eyes and asking questions about what is happening below the surface. Most importantly, it involves discussing what is learned, organizing the information and using it to promote better understanding and improvement of local situations.

If you are working in a community and have become familiar with the customs, traditions, histories, concerns and strengths of community members, you have probably been engaged in informal inquiry. Through informal observation and conversation, you have picked up information that allows you to work with people in that community. You can make your inquiry more formal and systematic when you identify a problem or topic that you want to study more closely. You then concentrate on collecting information related to that topic through observation and interviews. You write down what you are learning so that you will remember the details. Finally, you look at the information you have collected, analyze what it means and figure out how to use it to make changes or improve situations. The inquiry process helps you look at the community with new eyes in order to gain new understanding for improving the work you are doing.
Who can conduct research? Research was once considered a specialized activity that only scientists and academics could do. The researcher was an outsider, an expert who came into the community, collected information about the people and then left. Back at their university, they analyzed the information and used it to create policies and education programs. Usually the community never saw any connection between the information they supplied to researchers and the education programs they received.

In recent years, people have broadened their ideas about who can do research and why research is done. Many development workers and literacy educators are realizing that local people and literacy learners are very capable of researching their own communities and families. Local people have the information, they simply need training on how to identify specific problems and topics, collect information systematically and analyze their findings. They may also need encouragement to recognize the significance of their effort and the value of using their own ideas to improve their homes and communities. With a few simple research skills, literacy practitioners and learners can identify their community's needs and make their own recommendations for programs, policies and learning strategies. As community members they are motivated to use the information at the local level to create change.

Someone who does research as part of their community or educational work is called a practitioner-researcher. As you spend more time using the action-learning approach to design literacy lessons, you will see how closely research and practice are interconnected. Each of the activities in Section Two will include suggestions for doing inquiry in your local situation. The activities will also guide you in teaching others how to use the activities as inquiry tools.

Members of a literacy class, program staff, community group or family can become co-researchers when they use an activity to learn about and document something together. The action-learning activities are designed to help them talk about their lives, their families and their communities in order to identify problems they want to solve or topics that they want to learn more about.

What does inquiry look like? Many researchers try to organize inquiry into a step-by-step process. But we have found that the inquiry process doesn’t usually follow a well-planned line. Observations lead to questions and discussions that lead to more questions and observation and discussion and analysis which leads to more questions. To help make sense of the process, we have identified three actions that are always present in inquiry: 1) identifying a problem or topic, 2) collecting information, and 3) analyzing findings. With a little practice, you and the learners in your program can do all three as part of your inquiry/learning process.

1. **Identifying a problem or topic:** The action-learning activities will help you and the learners discuss issues related to literacy and learning in the family and community. In the process of the discussions, you will identify problems that need to be addressed. In addition, you will also identify rich sources of local knowledge that can be shared and documented. Although the activities focus on literacy and learning, they can be adapted to explore other issues that are important to people in the local community.
Each of the action-learning activities is introduced below with suggestions about how they can be used to help identify problems or topics for inquiry.

Activity #1 - Family Diagrams: Asking learners to draw pictures or diagrams of their family is an interesting way to introduce a discussion of many issues and problems that families face. For example, the diagrams may show that husbands are working in distant cities, that families are caring for aged grandparents, that women are raising children alone, or that the extended family is too close or too far away. The diagrams will also show how family members support each other and provide an important source of experience, knowledge and wisdom for advising each other about daily living.

Activity #2 - Family Literacy Survey: Collecting information about existing literacy materials and practices in families will help you identify problems family members face when they need to use reading and writing skills in daily life. It will also help you identify how family members use existing resources and informal sources of knowledge in creative ways.

Activity #3 - Family History: Helping families explore their family history will help you identify problems family members face in linking the different generations and members of their extended family. This activity will also help you identify the rich source of information that many elders possess that should be valued, shared and documented.

Activity #4 - Local Knowledge: Observing how families work together and teach each other can help you identify problems related to passing on traditional knowledge as well as sources of local knowledge that can be shared and documented.

Activity #5 - Community Mapping: Making a map of the family's relationship to institutions and resources in the community can be used to collect information on needs, resources, problems and opportunities in the community.

Activity #6 - Access Analysis: Interviewing individuals can help to identify problems and analyze barriers related to age, gender, class and ability that certain family members face in gaining access to community resources. The interviews will also help identify people who have ideas about ways to improve the community situation.

Activity #7 - Hopes and Fears Discussion: By talking with family members about hopes and fears concerning how literacy might affect family relationships and individual lives you can identify problems related to human relationships and interactions. The discussions in this activity can also help you identify motivations and constraints for literacy learning.

2. Collecting Information: The action-learning activities include two methods for collecting information. The first method is called Field Inquiry. In this method, you go to homes and other places in the community to interview and observe people involved in literacy and
learning activities. The second method is called Group Inquiry. In this method, you gather people together to bring out and discuss information they have inside their minds.

Field Inquiry: Your most important skills for collecting information through field inquiry are observation and listening. By listening carefully to what people say and observing ordinary learning activities and literacy practices, you will come to understand many things in new ways. The resources and ideas for your literacy program must come from your own community. The structured procedures of the action-learning activities will help you learn to see possibilities for literacy in new places. They will also help you gain deeper understanding for teaching and learning within families. This understanding will allow you to help families discover why, how and where literacy skills can help them in their daily lives.

Activity #2 prepares you to take a literacy tour to collect information on what kinds of print and written materials are available in the homes in your community. It also directs you to observe people reading and writing in order to make a list of common reading and writing practices.

Activity #4 prepares you to observe the many different varieties of informal teaching and learning that happens among family members on a daily basis. You will develop your skills to collect information from a variety of viewpoints.

Activity #6 prepares you to collect information on sensitive issues through informal observation and interviews.

Group Inquiry: The success of the action-learning activities depends on the participation of many people in your community. They are designed to get groups of people talking and sharing information from their life experience. The group inquiry process helps bring out information, ideas and knowledge that many people don’t even realize they possess. The drawing and mapping activities promote the active participation and enjoyment of everyone in the group. Telling stories is an informal and comfortable way to collect a lot of interesting information. All four of the following activities provide the stimulus to get people sharing stories about their families and community. In addition, Activity #3 includes detailed information on how to write down stories as they are told.

Activity #1 prepares people to talk about their families by having them draw a picture or diagram showing what the family looks like. The pictures cause other participants to ask questions and bring out interesting stories and important information for sharing in the group discussion.

Activity #3 is particularly useful to involve elder members of a family in telling family stories and remembering past events. By making a kinship chart or family tree, all members of the family get involved in remembering and documenting names and important information about ancestors and relatives. This activity uses group inquiry to draw out information and resources from family history.
Activity #5 involves people in making a map of community resources and discussing the relationship between their family and the local institutions.

Activity #7 helps people talk about and understand some of the concerns and problems that arise in the family when some members become literate.

_Keeping Written Records:_ The information that you collect from field and group inquiry needs to be written down. This is the way literacy skills are linked to the inquiry process. Maps, charts, stories, observations, interview responses all need to be written down. For beginning level learners, the documentation may be very simple - a few key words to remember important things. As learners build more skills, they can work together to fill out a chart, write down a story or make a questionnaire. A facilitator can keep a more detailed written record for the learning group. However, each learner should also keep their own notebook of important information that they have collected by themselves or with the group. Enthusiasm for a group inquiry project is a good motivator for learning to keep written records.

3. **Analyzing findings:** Many of the things you observe in your inquiry may seem obvious at first. You might wonder what is so special about inquiry if it seems like you are not learning anything new. But the purpose of research is to help you see things in a new way. You take the information out of daily life to understand how daily life affects literacy education. Each of the activities in this manual includes questions and suggestions for charts, lists, maps and timelines to help you organize and analyze the information you collect. The activities will help you analyze a familiar situation from a new perspective. The basic activities of analysis include labeling, summarizing, organizing, comparing, and asking why.

_Labeling:_ Diagrams and Maps like the ones used in Activities #1 and #5 use symbols to lay out the big picture and identify relationships between things. Deeper analysis of a map or diagram can be made by identifying and labeling problems, barriers, strengths, resources, etc.

_Summarizing:_ Summarizing information from several different surveys, observations and interviews can provide an analysis of the community situation. For example, the information from the Family Literacy Survey in Activity #2 can be summarized into categories by using the following questions. What are the most common literacy practices? What do most people need to be able to read? What do most people need to be able to write?

_Organizing:_ One way to analyze information is to organize events or historical information with a timeline. The timeline can help people examine how things have changed over time or how a series of events led up to a crisis, etc. It simply involves listing things in the order they happened and identifying how different events influenced each other. The family histories and stories in Activity #3 can be organized in this way to analyze changes or events in a family or community.
Comparing: Comparing is a very common form of analysis. It involves looking for similarities and differences between things. One way to compare information is to organize it on a chart. The theory behind a chart is to compare different kinds of information by placing them on a grid. Vertical columns are used for one type of information and horizontal rows are used for another type of information. For example, the following chart shows a way you might compare family, cultural and modern medical sources of knowledge about illness. In each of the empty boxes, you and the learners would write the appropriate remedies for illness listed in column one based on the source of information in the family, traditional healer or health center.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illness</th>
<th>Family Remedies</th>
<th>Traditional Healer</th>
<th>Health Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fever</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Asking Why: This is a technique for trying to understand the root causes of things. A problem is written on the board. The facilitator asks “why is this a problem?” The group then brainstorms possible reasons. Next they look at the list of reasons and ask “why?” again. They attempt to identify another level of reasons or causes. They can continue asking why and examining the reasons and causes until they begin to identify and understand the complexity of the problem as well as some of the reasons or causes that they can do something about. The process can be diagramed like a tree showing causes and effects as roots and branches.

USING THE ACTION-LEARNING ACTIVITIES AS TOOLS FOR LEARNING

There are two purposes for using the Action-learning Activities as tools for learning — 1) to help the learners develop new literacy skills, and 2) to help them adopt new literacy practices. These two purposes link the learning process to the inquiry and organizing activities. First of all, in order to carry out the inquiry activities, the literacy learners will need to develop their basic reading and writing skills. Secondly, adopting new literacy practices should be one of the objectives of the organizing activities. This section briefly explains how the Action-learning Activities help learners develop new skills and adopt new literacy practices. It also provides some information on how to facilitate the learning process.

Developing Literacy Skills: Each of the action-learning activities are documented by drawing pictures and making charts. These are literacy or pre-literacy activities in that they involve representing and organizing information with symbols and writing. A variety of pre-
writing skills are involved in activities #1 Family Diagrams, #3 Family History and #5 Community Mapping. Pre-writing skills include drawing pictures and diagrams, making maps and charts, writing names and labels, making symbols and designs. These are excellent pre-writing activities because they are generated from group conversations and use ideas and information that come from the learners’ own experience. The process of representing information on paper through symbols and pictures lays the groundwork for more detailed writing activities.

Writing stories, descriptions, memories and anecdotes can be introduced very early. Beginning-level literacy learners can participate in the writing process and create their own reading material by telling their stories and ideas to someone who acts as a scribe. If you are not familiar with techniques for helping literacy learners write their own stories, you can refer to the Whole Language Manual in this Action-learning Series for information on the Language Experience Approach and Learner Generated Materials.

The inquiry activities offer many opportunities for learners to develop and use their writing skills. They should be encouraged to keep notes on information they collect through observations and interviews. They can also participate in summarizing and analyzing information by making charts, lists, timelines and diagrams. Every action-learning activity should be seen as an opportunity to develop reading and writing skills even though the focus of attention may be directed to the discussion and content of the topic and problems. But the process of the activity is as important as the content. Everyone should participate in making the charts and maps, writing the words and choosing the symbols. Allow enough time to help each person understand and actively participate in the reading and writing process.

**Adopting New Literacy Practices:** The activities contained in this manual can also be used to stimulate the adoption of new literacy practices in the home and community. The activities are designed to generate discussion and interest in particular topics or areas of life that require the use of reading and writing skills. Activity #2, Family Literacy Survey is designed to find out how people use reading and writing in their daily lives and to identify potential areas where they could learn to use new literacy practices. For example, using calendars for organizing and planning family activities or keeping records of a baby’s development in a baby book are family literacy practices that are done by families in some cultures and communities and might be of interest to newly literate family members.

Activity #3 Family History and #4 Local knowledge are particularly intended to introduce new practices of keeping family records, writing family histories and documenting traditional knowledge. The ideas introduced in these activities may be interesting and motivating to families who are interested in documenting their history or knowledge. Activity #5, Community Mapping explores institutions in the community which may require reading and writing to access their resources. Family members may need to develop their literacy skills in order to participate in activities of lending institutions, extension services, etc.

**Facilitating the learning process:** We use the term participatory curriculum development to describe the process whereby the learners work together with a facilitator to
plan and carry out their own learning experiences. They write their own reading materials and bring up their own issues for discussion. Each of the activities described in Part II can be seen as a starting point for entering into a participatory curriculum development process. Doing the activity as a group will create new opportunities for discussing more ideas and issues. The facilitator and learners can then decide what they want to continue learning. The participatory curriculum development process includes three strategies for learning — discussion, writing and reading. These three strategies can be used in many different combinations and sequences that build from the initial family literacy activity.

**Discussion:** Discussions are used to help learners share information from their own experiences and to help everyone understand and analyze the significance of the information they are sharing. The discussions are central to planning and analyzing the inquiry activities and provide an opportunity for the learners to help shape the progress of the class. The facilitator invites the learners to help decide what they want to read and write and do in their literacy class. Each of the Action-learning Activities provides the stimulus for a discussion of families, communities, literacy and learning. The information generated in these discussions in turn provides content for reading, writing and further discussion. It is also the key strategy for organizing and planning activities which will be discussed in the next section.

**Writing:** Writing is used to organize thoughts, ideas and experiences. By helping the learners put their own words on paper, you can help them learn how to read and how to think about things in a systematic way. The charts, diagrams and pictures in the Action-learning Activities are pre-writing exercises that help learners understand how to represent ideas and information visually on paper. In the learning tools section of each activity, there are suggestions for additional writing activities. The learners can spend several workshops or class sessions working on family stories, making charts and discussing how to document ideas in written form. This process creates reading materials for the learners as well as for their families. Furthermore, writing is the key strategy for documenting information collected from the inquiry process. The inquiry activities can stimulate a series of writing activities.

**Reading:** Reading is used to learn new information, ideas and experiences. In the beginning, literacy learners start by reading the charts and labels on diagrams that they make themselves. As they become acquainted with the sounds and shapes of letters and words, they will also be able to read things written by other members of the group. Although this Action-learning Manual focuses on helping learners produce their own learning material, there are also suggestions for using materials that you find in the homes and community of the learners.

Participatory learning and inquiry evolve slowly from discussions with the learners. To make a learning or inquiry plan, you cannot always make a detailed step-by-step strategy in advance. Experienced facilitators have learned that if they have an effective starting point, the learners will help create the process by bringing up ideas, asking questions, requesting assistance, and offering suggestions. The Action-learning Activities in Section Two provide the
starting points for inquiry and learning. Each activity includes suggestions to help you think about ways to build on the basic activity and discussion with inquiry, learning and organizing activities. The main concern in being a facilitator is to trust in the process and the learners, and create a friendly and informal climate among the learners so that everyone will feel comfortable to participate. The Whole Language Manual contains more detailed information on how to plan and facilitate learning activities, if you need additional assistance.

**USING THE ACTION-LEARNING ACTIVITIES AS TOOLS FOR ORGANIZING**

This section describes three strategies for organizing literacy in families and communities. The first strategy is how to organize a family literacy program. The second is how to support and promote the use of literacy in home and community settings. And the third is how to promote social change at the community level.

1. **Organizing a family literacy program:** Most people automatically assume that literacy education must take place in a classroom or in a one-to-one tutoring session. However, there are many different ways to help people learn to read and write when we are focusing on helping them learn to use their literacy skills in daily life. The following list describes some of the options for organizing action-learning activities to promote literacy in the family and community. Think about which settings are most appropriate for your organization and the families you intend to work with.

   - **home-based:** Individual families or a group of families from the same neighborhood meet in a home to do family literacy activities. They plan their own activities under the guidance of a visiting facilitator.

   - **class-based:** Adult literacy classes focus on family literacy. Adult learners plan activities and learn skills in class to take home to their families.

   - **school-based:** The activities are planned by a family literacy planning group made up of teachers, parents, administrators and possibly older children. The activities are given to the children at school for them to take home to their families.

   - **workshop-based:** One or more sessions are offered by a community service agency. Activities are planned by a group made up of facilitators from the service agency and parents from the participating families. They organize workshops and invite local family members to come discuss literacy issues and practice reading and writing, or to create literacy materials and activities to use at home.

   - **meeting-based:** One or more meetings can be held to discuss an issue, make an action plan or recommend changes in the community. Meetings are organized by a planning group made up of adults from families in the community. The planning group may also include representatives from relevant service agencies (NGO, government, school, etc.).

   - **other:** What other ways can you think of to structure family literacy or action-learning activities?
2. Supporting and promoting the use of literacy in home and community settings: The purpose of promoting literacy in the family and community is to help family members gain new skills and knowledge that they can use to improve their lives. New practices can be built from things families are already doing, or they can be built on the activities of service agencies in the community. A new literacy practice can help people of all ages, male and female, to build their literacy skills for daily life. Two examples of building a literacy activity on a family activity are described below:

*Family Documents and Photos:* Many families have important documents and photos that need to be safely stored. A new family literacy practice could be to organize these documents and photos by writing names and dates on them. A family could create a family file box and have family members learn to write their names as well as other family members' names as part of this activity. This activity could be sponsored by a women's group, a club, a school, or it could be an individual family activity.

*Family Stories:* Many families have traditions of telling stories. Various kinds of literacy activities could connect to this family tradition. 1) The school children could write some of the stories which their parents or grandparents tell and make a family book. In the future, the children can continue to tell the stories to their children and grandchildren by reading stories from the book. 2) Readers in the family could read a story to other family members from a book. The tradition of story-telling continues, but story reading is alternated with story-telling. This literacy practice could be done by one or a group of families. Families can exchange stories. Schools or adult literacy programs could sponsor workshops to make family storybooks and have community reading sessions.

In many cases, a new literacy practice can be introduced by specific organizations in the community such as a health center, cooperative savings club, women's group, extension agency and so forth. A new literacy practice can be introduced to individuals or small groups during an office visit, through a family visit, in a workshop. Here are two examples of new literacy practices which can be introduced by community agencies:

*Growth & Health Records:* Children's growth charts and immunization records are routinely given to mothers by many health clinics. However, few health workers take advantage of the opportunity to help the mothers learn about the uses of health records. A health clinic could link with a literacy program to help mothers learn to use their reading and writing skills to document their children's health as well as their physical and mental development. Mothers can begin by learning to write down information such as a child's weight, height, what they eat, or when they are immunized. Later they can record things they observe about their child's physical and mental development. They can also learn about how to create work and play activities to encourage the child's development. This activity could be sponsored by a health clinic, a mothers club, or a literacy class.

*Agriculture and Environment:* Many governmental and nongovernmental agencies
are concerned about the impact of farming practices on the environment. Projects can incorporate literacy lessons into their workshops and project activities by teaching participants to collect information and write about traditional practices, the history of the land, weather patterns, crop yields, etc. Families may have oral information about planting and conservation practices that can benefit the project. Families could learn to keep individual records of their farming efforts as part of a new family literacy practice. This type of activity could be sponsored by a farmers club, an agricultural extension service, or a school.

3. Promoting social change at the community level: Very often as groups of adults meet together in family literacy discussions, they will discover that there are problems in their community which they need to address. The facilitator can assist them in using their new literacy skills to plan and implement an appropriate action. The action-learning activities encourage groups and family members to use their new writing skills to list options, outline agendas for meetings, make action plans, write letters, make posters, read background information, and do other relevant literacy activities required for organizing themselves to take action on a problem.

The action activities they choose to organize can range from setting up a community discussion meeting or organizing a volunteer work team to linking with a national level organization to advocate for wider social change. The activity may involve actions by individuals, families, and the community. It may also involve recommendations or requests for the government and local organizations. Long-range recommendations may involve lobbying the government or organizing pressure groups to promote policy change.

Community-based strategies for action would involve bringing together people from many families in the community to address a problem or to create something to benefit the whole community. For example, if family literacy participants become concerned that girls do not attend school as frequently as boys. They could sponsor a community meeting to discuss the problem. In the meeting, they can identify the barriers in their community and make a plan to help the girls. They may decide to hold classes at a different time or place, provide child-care services, or help families organize girls’ work differently. This type of activity could be sponsored by a mother’s club, a community group, the local school, or health post.

SUMMARY

The Action-Learning Activities are designed to help you set up a participatory learning and inquiry process that leads to organizing appropriate changes in the home or community situation. Your inquiry plan will naturally overlap with the learning plan because participatory curriculum development uses inquiry activities to collect information for reading, writing, and discussion. Think of using your inquiry plan to collect and analyze information while you use your learning plan to teach reading and writing skills through helping learners organize and document information that is interesting and important to them. Finally, think of using your organizing plan to help families put their literacy skills to work as they adopt new literacy practices at home or carry out an action plan to improve something in the community.
Section Two: The Action-Learning Activities

Each of the activities in Section Two are used simultaneously for inquiry, learning and organizing. They can be adapted for use in a planning group, home, classroom, workshop or other situation. The guidelines for each activity outline the purpose and procedure, and provide you with suggestions for developing lessons, inquiry activities and learning materials. You are encouraged to select the activities that are relevant to your situation and use your own creativity and insight to develop inquiry, learning and organizing activities. The following activities offer you a range of choices and guidelines to assist you in developing your literacy program. In selecting activities and preparing to use them, take into consideration your local cultural norms and adapt or change the activities as needed.

Activity #1: Family Diagrams
Draw pictures maps and diagrams of family structures in order to define family and explore the concept of family literacy.

Activity #2: Family Literacy Survey
Collect information about existing literacy materials and practices in families.

Activity #3: Family History
Make a kinship chart (family tree) as a stimulus for collecting stories and memories from family members in order to write and preserve family history and understand differences between generations.

Activity #4: Local Knowledge
Observe how family members work in informal teaching and learning situations in order to document local knowledge and to identify creative ways to organize family learning activities.

Activity #5: Community Mapping
Draw maps of the family's interaction with various organizations in the community in order to identify where family members need literacy skills to gain access to resources.

Activity #6: Access Analysis
Interview family members and organize a small participatory action research project to identify problems, analyze barriers and plan a strategy to enable family members to gain access to education and community resources.

Activity #7: Hopes and Fears Discussion
Talk with family members individually and in groups to understand and discuss some of their motivations and constraints related to family literacy activities.
ACTIVITY #1: FAMILY DIAGRAMS

PURPOSE

This activity starts the discussion of literacy and learning in the family by identifying the various ways families are structured. For example, families are structured in many different ways ranging from an extended household of grandparents, parents and brothers with their wives and children to a single mother struggling to support children alone. The concept of family is usually defined by biological relationships, but it can also be defined by purely social relationships. For example, a "family" could be a cluster of orphans who help each other survive on the street. Regardless of structure, family members work together to teach each other and to share the tasks of daily survival.

Through drawing and discussing pictures of their own families, people are able to look beyond stereotypical assumptions about the ideal family and discuss real family structures in a relaxed and open way. We use the word diagram to describe the drawing because it is more than a family portrait representing each family member. The diagram shows how a family is organized. Some people draw a map to show their relationship to family members who are living in different locations. Some people create abstract diagrams showing relationships while others draw a diagram of their house to show how members of the household are organized. Some people also like to use symbols to illustrate emotions and relationships such as love and closeness or disagreements and separation. Each person decides the best way to draw their diagram to show how family members are connected to each other.

PROCEDURE

Take enough paper, crayons, pencils, chalk, markers or pens so that each person can make a picture. If paper and writing materials are in short supply, feel free to draw pictures on any available surface. This activity can be done with sticks on a patch of smooth earth, with charcoal on a board or wall, or even by using rocks, leaves and other objects to represent the different people. Have each person draw their family configuration and describe it to the group. Then compare and discuss the different family configurations.

Many things can be learned from discussing family configurations. This activity can be used as an inquiry tool to increase your understanding of families in the community where you work; it can be used as a learning tool to develop a family literacy curriculum; and it can be used as an organizing tool to help a group of people identify ways to work together to improve their family or community situation.

Using Family Diagrams as an Inquiry Tool

The description and discussion of family configurations will bring out many interesting ideas, issues and dilemmas that families experience. After each person has described his or her picture, help the group to discuss and analyze the information. You can develop a list of
questions which are relevant to your program and community. Here are a few suggestions for getting started:

1. What are some of the common characteristics of families in our group?
2. What are common needs, interests or problems faced by families?
3. What are special problems faced by some family members?
4. What ideas for family learning and literacy come to people’s minds?
5. What are family strengths and needs?

Have someone in the group take notes on the responses to these and other questions. Make a summary of what was discussed. This summary will provide valuable information about families that can be used to prepare literacy materials and organize future activities. Make a note of issues or topics that need more discussion or further inquiry. Discuss with the group other ways to collect information that will help in documenting and solving problems.

Using Family Diagrams as a Learning Tool

The ability to make pictures, diagrams and maps is a literacy skill because it involves using written symbols to organize and convey information. The freedom of drawing allows new writers to use symbols and pictures to express their ideas more easily. Drawing helps them develop their writing skills. After drawing pictures of their families, adults will have many questions for each other about their families. The discussion of the pictures can prepare the group for writing activities on many topics related to the family.

This activity can be used as a single learning activity or as the opening activity for a series of learning activities. With a beginning class, writing the names of family members can be a way to begin learning the alphabet. In subsequent classes, the group members can learn to write the names of all their family members. They can also tell and write sentences and stories about and for their families using a technique called the Language Experience Approach. This technique is described in the Whole Language manual and can be used to create an individualized reading text for new learners based on their own words and stories. Starting with the drawing of their family configuration, class members can create their own literacy learning texts by writing sentences and stories for themselves and for members of their family.

The family diagram activity can serve as the starting point for participatory curriculum development. The curriculum will be determined by what the group members discuss when they share their drawings. To identify and choose a focus for curriculum development, you can lead the group in a discussion of some of the common characteristics, needs, interests or problems faced by the families. For example, do many of the families have young children? A learning activity could be developed where the learners create reading materials for their children. Are their family members living in distant locations? A learning activity could be developed where the class members learn to write personal letters or create a community newsletter to send to
friends and relatives who live far away. Are there many elderly grandparents? A learning activity could be created to interview these people and write down some of their stories and knowledge to save for future generations. These are just a few possibilities, others will be generated by your group.

In planning learning activities, remember the three strategies for participatory curriculum development: discussion, writing and reading.

1. What are some ideas or issues that came up when you discussed the family diagrams? How can you organize further discussion to address these topics?

2. What are some follow-up writing activities that could be used to explore the ideas and issues that came out of the discussion of the diagrams?

3. How can you help the learners develop their reading skills through reading the things they have written about their family diagrams? Do you know of any reading materials that could be shared and read by the learners?

Using Family Diagrams as an Organizing Tool

This activity is a useful way to introduce the concept of family literacy. It is easy and fun to do. It also presents a comfortable way for people to begin talking about their families. The discussion of the diagrams can give you insights into new ways to organize your literacy program. Remember there is a range of options for organizing family literacy activities that can be done at home, in workshops or in community meetings as well as the traditional school and classroom-based learning activities.

For example, you may want to hold workshops to create materials or activity packets that learners can take home and share with their families for a home-based strategy. If you have uncovered some issues in the local community that affect many families, you may want to organize a meeting to discuss the issues raised in the family diagrams with a wider audience. If you need to get more information before addressing community leaders or organizations in the community, you can organize an action research activity with the learners and their families.

ACTION PLANNING

Get input from the learners about what they would like to do? What issues, problems, topics, interests came up in the discussions that they might want to pursue?
ACTIVITY #2: FAMILY LITERACY SURVEY

PURPOSE

This activity is designed to help you identify how literacy is used by individuals and families in your community. Each community provides different literacy opportunities for family members. In some communities and homes, there are printed materials everywhere you turn -- newspapers, school books, posters, manufactured products, notebooks, paper, account books, legal documents, etc. In other communities and homes, there is very little -- maybe a few school books, documents or religious books carefully wrapped and stored in family cupboards. The purpose of this activity is to identify the existing and potential opportunities for literacy in your community. The results of the family literacy survey will provide information about literacy needs, areas of interest and literacy activities that will be most useful for families in your community.

Another purpose of this exercise is to broaden your awareness of literacy. Many people have a very narrow definition of literacy. They see it as an individual skill for reading and writing that is learned in school. Literacy is a social skill. People participate together in reading and writing activities in many different ways. At a minimum, there are two people involved in a literacy activity - a writer and a reader. But often there are several writers and several readers who discuss and organize the information. For example, when a man dictates a letter to his son, he is composing the letter and his son is acting as scribe. When a mother reads a story to the child or a child reads a story to a mother, both are participating in the reading process. They are helping each other learn. Even a small baby may participate in a literacy activity by touching the book and looking at pictures.

An important goal of family literacy is to broaden awareness of all aspects of literacy participation. When you do this family literacy survey, you will be looking for all kinds of participation in literacy activities. You will want to observe who can actually read and write. But you will also want to observe who participates by listening to someone read or by telling someone what to write. When someone saves written records or uses printed words or symbols around the home, they are also participating in the use of literacy in daily life. Some examples of literacy materials and practices that have been observed in families from different countries are listed below.

Examples of Literacy Materials and Practices

Scrapbooks (family history example from a Hmong refugee family in the United States):
An illiterate grandfather who doesn't speak English compiles scrapbooks documenting the history of his family and his people who are refugees from Laos living in the United States. He organizes his children and grandchildren to assist him with finding and reading the newspaper and magazine articles for his collection.
Immunization Cards and Growth Charts (Health Example from Nigeria):
Mothers, who cannot read and write, carefully wrap immunization cards and growth charts in plastic and store them in a safe place so that they can carry the cards to the clinic each time they take their child. Although they can’t read the information themselves, they clearly understand the importance of the cards for keeping records and obtaining services from the clinic.

Work Assignment Charts (household work example from U.S.A.):
A mother teaches her children to read, keep records and take responsibility for household tasks by making a chart that lists each child’s name and assignments. The children get to put a star by each task they complete and earn points for a small reward.

Diary or Log Book (agriculture example from Costa Rica):
A father keeps a log book with information about weather, dates of planting, crop yields, etc. He records information after each significant event and refers to it in managing his farm.

School Books, Notebooks, Pens (children and school example from The Gambia):
Boys have leisure time after school to play and do homework, while girls have to cook and clean. The boys think the girls are falling behind in school because they are not as clever. No one seems to notice that the girls are falling behind because they have no time to study.

Government Documents (government example from Nepal):
A father keeps receipts for the land tax with other important documents. He goes to a neighbor for help to understand amounts and regulations. He would like to be able to manage this process himself.

PROCEDURE

A Family Literacy Survey involves observing and documenting the reading and writing activities of people in a particular household in a systematic way.

1. Identify a family to observe: Ask a family to let you observe and discuss their daily activities that involve printed or written materials. You may choose your own family or the family of a friend or relative. If you are working with a group of literacy learners, they can observe their own families and/or families of friends, relatives and neighbors.

2. Take a literacy tour: Start by taking a literacy tour of the household and make a list of literacy materials that you find: paper, notebooks, pencils, calendars, books, documents, etc. Ask family members about things they do that require reading and writing, calculating and/or record-keeping skill. Ask them to show you examples of the things they read and have written for personal and family use.
3. **Observe literacy activities**: Take time to watch different family members at work or play to discover activities that they might not have thought of mentioning. Observe both men and women, adults and children; even those who cannot read and write. Literacy researchers have been surprised to find so-called illiterate adults who manage personal documents, photos, letters and other printed materials. Develop your awareness of literacy practices and make it a habit to observe and think about the use and meaning of literacy in daily life.

4. **Make a list of literacy materials and practices you observe.**

**Using the Family Literacy Survey as an Inquiry Tool**

1. **Analyzing survey information with a chart**: The information you collected from the family literacy survey becomes more useful and interesting when you analyze it to identify what kinds of literacy materials, skills and activities exist and do not exist in the family’s current literacy practices. A chart like the one below is useful for organizing and analyzing the information. In the right hand column is a list of typical areas of life where written and printed materials might be used. The next two columns provide spaces for you to fill in the materials and practices you observed in each area of life. By filling in your observations on the chart, you can identify which areas of life currently require the family members to use their reading and writing skills. The parts you fill in on the chart will show family resources and skills as well as attitudes and cultural practices related to reading and writing. The parts that are left blank will show areas for the possible introduction of new literacy practices. The list of areas is not comprehensive. There is extra space to write in other areas of life that are relevant in the community where you are working.
Analyzing Information from a Family Literacy Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Life where reading and writing might be used</th>
<th>Observed Literacy Materials</th>
<th>Observed Literacy Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Documents (marriage, birth, and death certificates, family records)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family History (photos, diaries, journals, letters, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Information and Records</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Books and Materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Household Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture (information, records, etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business (information, records, advertisements)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School (books, notebooks, certificates, records, letters from school)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>History (family, local, national)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Events (newspapers, magazines)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal/Government (taxes, titles, deeds, certificates, licenses, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment (books, songs, poetry, TV, media)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2. Using the chart for discussion and further inquiry: The chart can be discussed in several different ways to learn more about how families use their reading and writing skills. The following questions can be used in interviews, literacy classes or planning groups to learn more about family literacy practices.

(1) What were the most interesting literacy materials and practices you observed? What resources and skills did you discover? What ideas and practices could be shared with other families in the community? Can some family members be teachers or resource people for a literacy class or workshop?

(2) Who was involved in which literacy practices? How do family members help each other? Who is teaching? Who is learning? Who is actively participating? Who is observing? Who is dependent? Who is independent? Who is included or excluded? Are there differences between the participation of men and women, boys and girls? Why or Why not?

(3) Do people express a need for learning more skills? What areas of life do they feel a need to have better literacy skills? Who is interested to learn more? What kinds of classes, workshops or activities could be organized to help people learn and practice literacy skills?

(4) Are people interested to try out new literacy practices in areas of life where they have never considered a need for literacy skills? Which areas? Why are they interested in these areas?

Using the Family Literacy Survey as a Learning Tool

The family literacy survey can be used to raise awareness and to develop literacy skills. You can use the survey as an awareness raising tool to help learners broaden their understanding of how they participate in many different kinds of literacy practices. You can also use the survey to help them learn how to make and use charts to analyze their own knowledge and observations.

1. Raising Awareness: The family literacy survey can be used effectively to help literacy learners to broaden their awareness of all aspects of participation in literacy activities. Many learners have a very narrow definition of literacy. They think only of the concrete skill of being able to put the words on the paper, or being able to decipher the meaning of a message. They overlook the roles of thinking, listening and speaking which are very important to understanding and communicating the meaning of the written words. A man who dictates letters to his son may think he is illiterate, but he is the organizing force in the writing process. He is producing the content and composing the letter. His son is only acting as a scribe for his thoughts.

When literacy learners are invited to do a family literacy survey, they should be asked to look for all the ways that they participate in using the written word to communicate with others
and to understand and preserve important information. Through discussing what they already know how to do, you can help them identify their strengths and skills as well as what they need to learn in order to take the next step to independent reading and writing. The learners can make a list of things they can already do to participate in literacy activities. These include listening to someone read and discussing the content, telling someone what to write, saving written records and using print or symbols around the home.

In addition, learners should also be invited to observe and discuss how they use other strategies such as songs, memory, symbols, etc. to perform some of the same functions that written words perform. In this way, the literacy learners can discuss, document and validate some of the valuable tools of their oral culture that are sometimes lost and/or undervalued when literacy and schooling come into a community.

2. Developing Literacy Skills: Making charts is a very useful literacy skill for developing the ability to compare and analyze information. A group of literacy learners can work together to make various charts to analyze the information they collect about literacy materials and practices. At the beginning level, they can formulate a simple chart that includes each group members' family and columns for relevant information that they collected. As the group gains more skill, they can make more complex charts to document and compare their responses to some of the discussion questions listed above in the inquiry tools section.

Examples of simple charts that learners can fill in as they discuss results of their family literacy surveys:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Family</th>
<th>Literacy materials in the home</th>
<th>Who can read and write?</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Family</th>
<th>Safest way to save important documents</th>
<th>Name/Family</th>
<th>How to remember important information</th>
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Using the Family Literacy Survey as an Organizing Tool

There are a number of ways to use the family literacy survey as an organizing tool. Summarizing the information from various families’ surveys and answering the questions in the inquiry section can help you identify some areas of interest and some specific literacy skills that are important to work on in your community. Family literacy activities can be organized to focus on accomplishing a specific task such as learning to write letters or to manage family records. They can also be organized around developing new literacy materials and practices in a specific area of life such as teaching children or keeping records for home businesses. The literacy activities can be accomplished in the home, classroom, meetings, school or workshops depending on what you want to accomplish.

ACTION PLANNING

Think about what you would like to achieve with a family literacy program. What are some ways that you can use the “Family Literacy Survey” to identify your needs and reach your program goals?

1. What skills do people want to develop?
2. What areas of life do people want to focus on?
3. What resources do you need?
4. What format will work best for follow-up activities?
5. Who will be responsible to carry out the new learning activities?
ACTIVITY #3: FAMILY HISTORY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this activity is to tap into the family's oral history as a source for developing reading and writing materials. It is also a good way to bring the older and younger generations together to build family unity and to document family records, histories, stories and important events.

PROCEDURE

Kinship charts or family trees are used as a strategy to organize and review the family history. To make a kinship chart, you need to invite the older generations to provide information and tell stories. The younger generation listens, asks questions and helps record information. A kinship chart or family tree is simply a chart listing names of family members and ancestors with lines showing relationships between parents and children. You can demonstrate how to make kinship charts in a workshop or class so that people can go home and make charts with their own families or you can visit families individually to help them make the charts.

You will need several large sheets of paper and markers or pens to make the charts. You can use the following guidelines to develop a kinship chart with a family.

1. Hold a meeting with the family at their convenience. Be sure to invite the elder
members of the family to participate and let them know their knowledge and stories will be needed. Tell family members that the meeting is informal and you want everyone to participate in the discussion. (You might want to show pictures of your family and talk about your family tree as an example.)

2. **Ask how many people are in the family, and what their different relationships and responsibilities are.** Have parents (or grandparents) talk about their extended family. Start drawing a family chart on a large sheet of paper showing the various members of the family and the relationships between parents and children. Involve those who can write in recording the names.

3. **Relatives and ancestors can also be included on the chart.** With an extended family it can be complicated to show the ancestry of every person. You may need additional charts to show the ancestors of the men and women who have joined the family. Some families may have family documents or genealogy charts that can be helpful.

4. After the chart is completed, **ask if any corrections should be made.** Next, gather information about each family member listed on the chart and write notes next to their names. Include information such as their age or date of birth, occupation, where they lived, etc.

5. The next level of discussion can **focus on stories/events relating to family members.** When someone begins recounting events, take good notes. Later read it back to them and ask if you got it right.

6. **Ask those who cannot write to tell a story while a literate family member writes it down.**

This process can be extended over several meetings if you and the family members or learners are interested. Different families will have different levels of interest in recording family history and stories. Encourage family members with literacy skills to write down additional stories about themselves as well as others in the family. Encourage the elders to be involved in follow-up activities.

**Using Kinship Charts as an Inquiry Tool**

You can learn many things about a family while making a kinship chart. You can observe the interactions of the family members. Make a note of who does the talking; who knows the most stories; who has the best memory of names, dates and places; who is included. Notice the role of women in the kinship chart. Some cultures tend to leave the women out when recording family information giving recognition only to sons. Other cultures consider married women to be members of their parent’s rather than their husband’s household. You can begin to identify issues for women as you create the kinship chart together. Finally, you can observe similarities and differences between the kinship chart and the family diagram you made in the previous activity.
Family history discussions can stimulate an interest to learn more about the lives and activities of ancestors. You can organize activities to find other documents such as church records, government census, military records, etc. Seek knowledgeable people among members of the extended family and community who know the oral histories and family lineages. Read about historical events that ancestors participated in. For families who have migrated from another region or country, they may want to read books about the homeland or talk to people who have recently come from there.

**Using Kinship Charts as a Learning Tool**

Making a kinship chart requires several different literacy skills. The process helps people learn how to organize information on paper. The family members can learn how to record time visually by listing the generations in chronological order. They can also learn to use lines and symbols to communicate information about relationships. Everyone can learn about spelling and numbers by writing names, dates and life events that are relevant to their family experience. Finally, the process of making the chart may also help older family members remember stories and other information. These stories and oral histories can be written down and made into family books. In this way, the kinship chart activity motivates families to keep family records and write family histories, and develops an important new literacy practice in the home.

**Family History Activities:** The kinship chart activity is intended to help people draw upon their own family history as a source for reading and writing materials. Some examples of Family History Activities are given below.

**Writing and Preserving Family Records:** While drawing the chart you can collect information by writing the family members' names, dates of birth and death. You can also write about weddings, participation in village affairs and political events. Families may also have legal or religious documents associated with these events. Encourage them to store these in a safe location, or put them together to make a Family Record Book.

**Memories:** Family members may have much to say about their ancestors and living family members. As they help draw the kinship chart, they may relate memories about a person's character, habits or ways of doing things. Write these memories down and keep them with the information on the kinship chart. They can be used to write personal profiles or stories at another time, or simply saved for future generations to read and come to know that person.

**Documenting Local History:** Discuss how to make a timeline showing when family members lived and how important events in their lives corresponded with historical events in the community, nation, region, or world.

**Family Stories:** Every family has stories to share. Sometimes these stories transmit values and norms to younger generations. Many parents and grandparents like to tell stories to their children. When drawing the chart ask questions to encourage family members to recount
stories. Write the stories down and read them back to make sure they are accurate. Encourage the family to develop a collection of stories.

**Family Traditions:** Every family has special traditions that they practice during special holidays or even in their daily life. Some of these traditions include eating special foods, participating in special activities or doing special things. The family history activity can also be a time to discuss the origins of family traditions and for family members to share their memories of the traditions that are important to them.

**Folk Tales:** Most children love folk tales. Elder family members often know good tales that have been passed down through the oral traditions of the family. Working on the kinship chart may remind people of the folktales they heard from elders when they were children. These folktales can be written down and made into a family book to be preserved with other family stories.

You can encourage literate family members to write down the information generated through the above activities. Family histories, memories and stories can be wonderful texts for others to read and practice writing. But most importantly, writing preserves family information that is being lost as children no longer have time for the oral traditions of their elders. Kinship charts and related literacy activities can be a way to bridge generations as well as oral and written cultures.

In some cultures, people may have concerns or fears about writing stories and keeping permanent records about people. For example, one woman in Bangladesh who participated in an oral history activity was very concerned about the relationship between herself and the tape-recording of her voice. She felt that it would not be a good thing for the recording to exist after she died. Out of respect for her comfort, the facilitator erased the recording. In other cultures, horoscopes or other written documents related to a person’s life are burned at the cremation ceremony. Drawing kinship charts and writing family histories may bring out cultural concerns about written records of people who have passed on. These issues have great significance in family literacy and should be discussed thoroughly.

There are no final answers for handling each situation. Cultures should be respected. But we live in times of change and literacy is influencing the changes. Discussing the issue of written records is part of the process of understanding how family traditions are being affected by literacy in a changing world. The kinship chart activity can also serve as a motivation to revitalize oral traditions. There may be family knowledge or stories that cannot be written but that children need to memorize or learn by working and associating with their elders.

**Writing Family Stories:** Writing family stories can be a good group learning activity. It involves telling the story, taking notes, writing the notes in more detail and making a final corrected version. The most difficult part of writing family stories is that the writers cannot write as fast as the story teller can talk. One way to make the writing process easier is to make it a group project.
(1) Telling the story: Some people are naturally good story-tellers who need no assistance to tell a story. However, other family members also have stories, but may be hesitant about telling them. The group can encourage new story-tellers by asking questions and encouraging them.

(2) Taking notes: Once the storyteller gets started, you may or may not want to interrupt them to get the details of the story on paper. You don't want them to lose track of their thoughts. Usually it is better to let them talk and take brief notes. Several people can take notes while the story teller talks to make sure that none of the details of the story are missed. (You can use a tape recorder if one is available, but this is not necessary.)

(3) Writing down the details: After the story teller is finished talking, the group reviews their notes (or the recording) and works together with the story teller to rewrite the notes in complete sentences with all of the details.

(4) Reading the written story and making corrections: Next someone reads the written story and asks the storyteller if all of the details are correct and are in the right order. Finally, the writing group corrects spelling errors and makes sure that punctuation and details are correct.

(5) Final version: Someone who has good penmanship can recopy the story into a final format. If the family or group of learners is interested, they can make the story into a book or collection of stories and arrange to have multiple copies made.

Using the Kinship Chart as an Organizing Tool

Promoting new literacy practices in the home: Keeping family records and writing family history is something that all families should be encouraged to do in their own homes. One interesting follow-up strategy for the kinship chart activity is to develop a series of workshops or home-learning materials to assist families in organizing their family records and writing stories from their family history. The following list includes some activities that could be carried out in different settings.

Family Records: Help each family get notebooks and other materials to keep family records. Help them practice different record keeping skills such as lists of family members names, birth date, initiation information, marriage date, special events, death dates, etc. Practice telling and writing stories and other information.

Family History Class: Organize a class to teach people to make kinship charts, keep family records and/or collect family histories and stories. The class can continue meeting until all group members have confidence in their skills.

Promoting Family History in the Community: The following list includes several different ways to promote family history activities in the community.
Local History in the School: Work with teachers at the local school to plan a learning unit on family history. Children can be trained at school to interview their parents and grandparents about family stories or life in earlier times. The children can write stories and make books as part of a class project. The stories and books can be kept in the school library as part of the local history of the community. Elders can also be invited to the school to tell stories to the children.

Book-Making: Organize a series of workshops for community members to create a book or collection of stories based on family and local history. There could be one session to train people to collect stories, a second session to help them write and edit the stories, and a third session to make the stories into books. Copies of the books can be kept in a community reading center as well as in people's own homes.

Raising Awareness about Gender Issues: Kinship charts bring up issues about the role of women in the family. As mentioned above, the written records in some cultures often exclude women and only recognize male descendants. The Family History activity may bring some interesting gender and cultural issues to the forefront. You may want to use the kinship chart activity to promote serious discussion about deep-rooted cultural traditions that discriminate against women. The kinship charts can be used to discuss changing times and conflict between modern ideas and traditional practices. Separate meetings could be held for men and women followed by a joint meeting where each group reports on their discussion.

Community Research: Collect family stories for a community research project. Family stories provide a lot of valuable information on many topics. Participatory research projects can use the stories and oral histories of elder family members to research land ownership problems, traditional farming practices, environmental problems, traditional health remedies and other topics which can benefit families in the community. Your family history activity may help bring out and address a common problem in your community. Once an issue is identified, a group can organize a story collection project to document the history of the problem. The stories can then be used to discuss the changing situation and look for solutions from past experience as well as new ideas.

ACTION PLANNING

Think about what you would like to achieve with a family literacy program. What are some ways that you can use the "Kinship Charts" to motivate people to keep family records and write family stories? How can these activities help you reach your program goals? How could you use family stories to learn more about some of the family literacy areas in your community?
ACTIVITY #4: LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

PURPOSE

This activity is intended to help you identify natural teaching-learning interactions within the family where local or traditional knowledge is shared. The purpose of the activity is to identify and value local knowledge that is passed along orally or by working together. Inquiry, learning and organizing activities focus on promoting the continuation of local knowledge and forms of learning and on identifying appropriate places where literacy can be used to document information that elders would like to share with future generations.

What is Local Knowledge? Local knowledge is a term used to describe the knowledge that is important and relevant to a specific community. It is not often written down and published in books or taught in school, but it is important for daily life and has often been handed down within a family or community for generations through oral traditions, storytelling, apprenticeships and learning by doing. It includes local information about customs and traditions, the environment, health and agriculture, as well as world views, ways of knowing, values and ways of doing things. Since prehistoric times, families and communities have been creatively using and building up their local knowledge, through observations, trial-and-error, inventing new ways of solving daily-life problems, and by relying upon the available resources. They accumulated vast stores of knowledge that relate to their specific environments and respond to their changing challenges.

Local knowledge is often referred to as oral tradition because it is passed from person to person by word of mouth rather than in written form. Storytelling, songs, poetry, proverbs, advice, conversations are just a few of the ways that local knowledge is passed along. In addition to oral communication, local knowledge is also passed along by working together, participating in rituals, observing others and other nonverbal means.

If we analyze local knowledge from the perspective of western academic disciplines, we see that the knowledge of the local people covers all fields of science and technology. For example, in the case of physical sciences it includes agriculture, ecology, medicine, climatology, engineering, and irrigation; in social sciences - politics, the military, economics, sociology, and ethnology; and in humanities - communication, arts and crafts, philosophy and religion.

With the expansion of western culture and technology as well as the domination of certain regional cultures, many peoples' local knowledge systems have been marginalized. The expansion of money-based economies, western organizational structures and modern bureaucratic institutions brings formal schools based on western knowledge systems. Schooling and print materials produced by the literate culture overshadow and threaten to destroy the oral history and knowledge that has been handed down for generations in many communities. Children reject the learning of their parents and elders in favor of school knowledge which promises access to money and opportunities in the modern technology-based segment of society. Unfortunately, the promises of modernization are often empty and a situation is created...
within less affluent communities and nations where neither the older nor younger generations have sufficient knowledge for survival in their changing world.

**PROCEDURE**

You will make a series of observations which we call Viewpoint Observations. A viewpoint is a time and a place where you consciously observe the interactions of people around you. It can be planned in advance or it can be spontaneous. For your inquiry to be systematic you should write down your observations. In Activity #2, you did a family literacy survey where you focused on literacy materials and practices. In this activity, you should not limit your observations to literacy activities. Look at all types of teaching and learning practices, especially those that involve local knowledge. Observing the interactions of family members during work, rest, play and informal conversation. As you complete this activity, try to answer the following questions:

1. Who talks and shares information, knowledge or skills?
2. Who works together in daily work?
3. Who spends informal time (rest, play, etc.) together?
4. Who works together to solve problems?
5. What kinds of things get talked about: politics, household tasks, food, education, health, child rearing, etc.?
6. What are the forms of learning? working together, music, rhythm, observation, conversation, etc.

To answer these questions, you need to find people who will allow you to observe their daily activities and who are willing to teach you some of their traditional knowledge. You can also observe informally as you interact with members of the community in the course of your daily activities. Make a point to visit families at different times of day and at different places in the community, farms and homes.

You can conduct your family observations in different situations. For example, you may want to observe work time, meal time and free time. Another approach is to participate in the household activities while watching for particular types of interactions. Take note when you see something that interests you or something you would like to know more about.

Each time you observe an interaction between family members that helps you answer the above questions, write down what you have seen. After you have done several viewpoint observations, you will begin to be more aware of things you see around you that give you insights and ideas about family teaching and learning practices related to local knowledge.

Choose a few interesting viewpoints and make a chart to fill in like the examples on the next page.
1. In the Viewpoint column, explain where you are making your observation.

2. In the Observation column, describe what you are seeing: Who is present? What are their ages and gender? What are they doing? etc.

3. In the Comments/Question write down any ideas or questions that occur to you about the teaching-learning interaction you observe.

Examples of Viewpoint Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VIEWPOINT</th>
<th>OBSERVATION</th>
<th>IDEAS AND QUESTIONS THAT COME TO YOUR MIND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example 1 (from The Gambia): during the harvest season, in the family compound, early afternoon</td>
<td>All the women except nursing mothers, are away at the fields all day harvesting rice. The grandmother is watching the babies and toddlers of the working women.</td>
<td>Grandmothers spend a lot of time with babies during this time of year. Nursing mothers have some free time in the afternoon before pounding rice. What is the traditional knowledge that grandmothers have about child development? How do new mothers learn about child development and child care? What kind of learning activities can we create for young children and grandmothers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 2 (from Nigeria): in the family garden along the edge of the road, after school</td>
<td>Mother and daughter are planting beans in between the yam plants.</td>
<td>Nigerian women know many traditional methods for inter-cropping and crop rotation which modern agricultural workers are only beginning to learn about. Do they teach about this in the schools? Do the children learn &quot;modern&quot; systems of agriculture at school? Should the knowledge of Nigerian women be written down? Could we work with the schools to do this?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the Viewpoint Observation as an Inquiry Tool

The purpose of the viewpoint observation activity is to help broaden your understanding of family literacy beyond reading and writing skills. Literacy is one form of communication. As Paulo Freire, the Brazilian literacy educator said, people must be able to read both the word
and the world. The two processes work together. As parents teach children about agriculture, food preparation, marketing, moral conduct, social and cultural customs, and the changing political world, they are helping them to understand local knowledge about the world they live in. They are teaching them to read the world. Family literacy programs can be an effective way to link the two “literacy systems”: reading the world and reading the word, by helping people learn to write about their local knowledge.

Two kinds of information learned from viewpoint observations can be especially useful in planning a family literacy program. The first kind of information has to do with what family members know and can teach each other. This information about local knowledge will be useful to you in planning writing activities and other learning events. The second kind of information has to do with how family members interact and help each other learn. This information will be useful to you in organizing innovative approaches to teaching literacy and promoting the use of literacy in the home and community.

Finding out more about what family members know: After you have observed family members working together in different daily life activities, make a list of the various things you observed about their local knowledge. For example, you may observe that they know about food preparation, farming techniques, handicrafts, equipment repair, and many other things. You can learn more about their personal knowledge by asking questions and conducting informal interviews.

Interviewing is mostly a process of listening closely to what people say and recording their words as accurately as possible. Some people use tape recorders and transcribe the information or story word for word by playing back the tape. However, it is not necessary to use technology. After someone tells you a story or explains some interesting bit of local knowledge, you can ask them to help you write it down by sharing their information in small pieces, giving you time to write what they say in between. After you finish, you can reread the story together and make any corrections, changes or additions. Writing down information from interviews is an effective technique for teaching writing and for producing reading materials for the class and community. You can teach children and adult learners to interview and write about local knowledge.

Finding out more about how family members interact and help each other learn: How we learn things is as important as what we learn. The widespread influence of formal schools has caused us to give importance to information that comes from books. However, knowledge is learned and shared in many different ways. Howard Gardner identified seven kinds of intelligences that can help us understand how local knowledge is learned in families and communities: musical, physical, mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Reflect on the things you observed and think about how knowledge is shared and learned in the community where you work.

1. Musical: When do people sing? What are the words about? How does the rhythm support a work activity? Does the song have a purpose? What other things have you observed about music as a way of learning?
2. Physical: What do people learn by doing? Is instruction given by showing rather than telling?

3. Mathematical: What kinds of things need to be measured, weighed and counted in daily life activities? How is measurement done? What equipment is used? What body parts and gestures are used to measure, estimate and indicate sizes of things? How do people calculate and estimate prices?

4. Linguistic: What kinds of information is shared orally? What is shared through writing? What forms of speaking (story-telling, debate, argument, dialogue, etc) are valued? What forms of writing (poetry, stories, official documents, etc) are valued?

5. Spatial: How do individuals and families organize the space where they live and work? What are the important shapes (circles, squares, etc.) in the environment? What is considered near and far?

6. Interpersonal: What are some of the natural family groupings that occur in families you observed? Who works together or spends leisure time together? Are there groups according to gender or age? How do different generations relate?

7. Intrapersonal: What type of things do individuals do alone? When and how do people reflect by themselves? What is the purpose of individual thinking or meditation?

Using a Viewpoint Observation as a Learning Tool

There are a number of ways that you can use the viewpoint observation as a learning tool.

Writing Viewpoint Observations: Learners can do their own viewpoint observations and write about what they see. They can do the activity as homework, or you can send the learners to different viewpoint locations during literacy class time and ask them to write what they see and bring their description back to share with the class.

Documenting Local Knowledge: Learners can work together to interview family and community members who have special knowledge about topics of interest. The information can be recorded as a story, a description of a process, a recipe, instructions for a task, a poem or any other form that is appropriate to document the information. The focus is on getting learners to write about their own knowledge and the knowledge of local community members.

The knowledge may be about anything ranging from religious rituals to agricultural practices. The purpose for the learners is to understand and record the local knowledge accurately from the point of view of the person they interview. They may ask the person to give demonstrations to help them describe how tools are used or processes are done. They may also need to ask for background information to make a complete story or document. The focus is on documenting the sequences, details and information about this knowledge.
Using other ways of knowing to inspire writing: Think about how the seven ways of learning and sharing information can be used to develop innovative learning activities. All of the different ways can be discussed in a literacy class and combined with reading and writing activities. For example,

- Songs can be written down.
- Instructions for a physical activity can be listed.
- Local methods for counting and measuring can be compared with methods learned in formal school.
- Spoken forms of sharing information can be written down.
- Maps or pictures can be drawn of homes and places in the community.
- Literacy learning activities can be planned for natural family groupings such as grandparent and grandchild, mothers and daughters, etc.
- Reading and writing for individual purposes can be introduced.

Using the Viewpoint Observation as an Organizing Tool

Three important issues for organizing literacy activities become apparent from the viewpoint activity. 1) How to organize literacy instruction in ways that are appropriate for all family and community members; 2) how to revitalize and preserve local knowledge; and 3) how to support the continuation of traditional forms of learning and sharing information.

Organizing Instruction: Think about natural ways reading and writing could be included in daily life, and what people need to know better to accomplish these activities. Think about things that could be done to teach children and adults in settings based in the home or neighborhood as well as the school or class. Draw upon what you have observed about natural family groupings or the time table of daily family life. Who can study together? When do people have time for literacy learning? Which members of the family can help others? How can you involve different community organizations.

The school may help organize a family literacy planning group composed of parents, students and teachers to address family problems that prevent children from attending school. For example, if some children are dropping out because of work responsibilities, planning group can recommend a way to organize a shortened school day or different school hours to enable those children to attend. They can also discuss how to organize work at home so that children can have time to study.

Revitalizing and Preserving Local Knowledge: Most adult literacy programs focus on delivering functional literacy skills and information intended to help people survive in the modern world. However, in traditional and marginalized communities, this information is not always relevant to the immediate needs. Literacy programs which are based on the realities of the local situation tend to be more successful. In these programs, the facilitators respect and draw upon the peoples’ local knowledge to teach literacy skills and to solve local problems and needs.
In this respect, literacy can play an important role to restore or revitalize local knowledge as learners are encouraged to write about their own culture and conditions. Adult learners have acquired all kinds of knowledge throughout their lives through oral communication with other people and through their experiences. Literacy programs can help learners write stories, articles and documents based on their own experience and knowledge. Programs can also teach learners to collect information through observation and interviews so that they can write down the stories, history and knowledge of other people in their community.

**Supporting the Continuation of Traditional Forms of Learning:** Family literacy programs can focus on all aspects of literacy and learning, traditional and modern. In addition to teaching reading and writing skills, the program can also support the continuation of traditional forms of learning and sharing information by incorporating these forms into classroom instruction and organizing special cultural events. For example, the program can sponsor or support cultural exhibits, dance performances, festivals, and local events. They can encourage the preservation of cultural learning in its natural setting and prevent the tendency to turn certain forms into western style performances for tourists. The literacy program can show that local knowledge and oral traditions are valued by holding workshops, documenting knowledge and encouraging the oral tradition to continue side-by-side with the new written forms.

**ACTION PLANNING**

Think about what you would like to achieve with a family literacy program. How can you use viewpoint observations and local knowledge in your program?
ACTIVITY #5: COMMUNITY MAPPING

PURPOSE

One way to assess a family's literacy needs and concerns is to draw a community map. A community map can show many things, such as streets, buildings, houses, wells, services, gardens, etc. It can be used to analyze things such as sanitation, land ownership or any community issue. In this case, the map is used to show the relationships between family members and the various organizations, services and institutions in the community. The map can reveal much about the family's needs and concerns. Your map may be more complex or simple depending on the family and community. The maps can serve as a starting point to assess and discuss local needs and resources.

The maps are examples of participatory tools which learners can use to analyze their situation and design a strategy to solve problems. Preparing and using participatory tools like maps contributes to the learners' ability to think through issues and to work towards solutions together.

PROCEDURE

The following instructions use paper with markers, pencils or crayons. If it is more appropriate for your situation, you can also make the map using stones, leaves, objects and markings on the ground. Either method is effective.
1. On a large sheet of paper write “family” in the middle and draw a figure for each family member. Identify places in the community where family members frequently go. Draw a picture or symbol to represent the places (market, tea shop, school, etc.) and draw a line connecting the family members who go there.

2. After you have identified the common places they visit, ask them about other places they visit less regularly (when they are sick, need money, need advice, etc.). Encourage them to name school, health centers, banks, religious leaders, politicians, etc. As they identify names, draw a symbol and write the name of the person or institution.

3. Draw lines to connect the family members with the places they go. You may want to include other symbols such as dotted lines for places not visited very often, long lines for places that are far away, fences for places that are difficult to get to.

4. After drawing the map ask the family members or learners to talk about who goes to different places and why. What do they observe about who goes to the various places?
   - Are there some places where only men, only women, or only children go? Why?
   - Are there some places where they feel uncomfortable going? Why?
   - For example, you may notice that only the sons go to the school. Why? Ask the girls and parents if they are curious about school? Do parents feel comfortable visiting the school?

5. Which places require reading and writing skills? What kinds of reading, writing, speaking, listening and social skills are needed in the different places? Do all family members have the skills to use the services of these places?

6. Talk about how the family members help each other get resources or information from community organizations. Do they work cooperatively? Is anyone left out? Do they get help from someone outside the family when they go to certain places?

Using Community Maps as an Inquiry Tool

Map-making is an excellent activity for assessing needs and resources. It can be used by an individual family, a neighborhood group, a literacy class, a community committee or any other setting. It can provide concrete information for discussing problems and deciding what kind of action to take. You can have each learner do an individual map showing how their family interacts with the community. These individual maps can help you learn about the literacy needs of each family. You can create lessons for literacy classes or family literacy activities to help learners and their families develop new reading and writing skills. You can also have a group do one large community map. This map will not show individual family member needs, but can help you begin discussions about common problems family faces in trying to get community resources.

1. Do family members need to read and write in order to use the services of the organization? Are there written materials that must be read?
2. Do people need to write to participate in the activities of the organization?

3. Who helps people who can’t read and write to deal with these organizations?

Examine the map you have developed. Notice that from the family perspective, there are multiple needs and activities. However, from the institution’s perspective, you will notice that they focus on a single need such as health, education or money. Institutions are created to provide resources to families. Unfortunately, their limited perspectives can sometimes cause problems for families. Furthermore, institutions don’t always consider the needs of all family members. They provide the service, but not necessarily the means to access the service.

Family literacy focuses on educational needs and practices both inside and outside the home. To be effective, every family member needs to interact with and access information from local institutions and service organizations. Family members also need to be able to share the information with other members of their household. Your inquiry into community and family literacy practices needs to examine who gets the information or skill training from local institutions and whether or not that information gets disseminated to all family members who are impacted or who need the service.

For example, in Paraguay, the men cultivate cotton, peanuts, manioc and corn. Pesticides are available through the government extension workers and the man of the family is the one who usually interacts with this service. But often pesticides are stored in the family compound. Who teaches the family about pesticide safety? Does the family have an internal education system? Does information get passed from husband to wife and children? Although instructions for these potentially deadly chemicals are written on the label. Thousands of people die every year because they could not read, and did not how to protect themselves while applying pesticides.

In Haiti, women traditionally go to the market to sell food and goods, and to trade. This work requires contact with a variety of formal and informal institutions such as money lenders, business people from the capital, and local merchants. The women in the family have an immediate need for math skills so they can sell and trade without being exploited. Additionally, daughters usually help their mothers in market activities. They also need skills for trade and commerce. But training is not available to women; and the schools only serve children who can pay tuition. Thus, the whole family suffers when women and girls do not get literacy training.

Identifying the Natural Support System for Family Literacy: Most families are able to access community resources with the help of family members, friends, or key people in local organizations. These people serve as a natural support system for families. Other examples of people in this support role include traditional healers, midwives, extension agents, teachers as well as educated relatives. In many businesses and service agencies, there are also employees who play a vital role in helping people understand how to use their services. Perhaps you are a part of the natural support system for local families in the organization where you work.
The people who form the natural support system are a varied group. It is important to identify these people and acknowledge the important role they play in the community. They may be potential resource people for family literacy activities. They may be interested in becoming involved with the literacy activities. Review the map you created for this exercise. Who are the natural support people who help the families access resources from the various organizations? These people may be important for you to work with.

Using Community Maps as a Learning Tool

**Literacy Skills Development:** Map-making develops literacy skills as well as organizing skills. Maps use symbols to show relationships between objects in the environment. For new literates, maps introduce the use of symbols to represent many things. Maps give a group a common frame of reference for discussion. The process of making a map can help a group discuss the different aspects of a situation. They build a common picture which they can refer to when discussing ideas or making decisions. In addition to developing the skills of map-making, information generated from discussing the map can stimulate writing activities for the class.

**Telling and Writing Stories to Examine the Impact of Social Change:** The arrival or departure of a business, service agency or government institution in a community often changes the way people do things. You can learn a lot about how they impact family life by asking learners to tell and write stories of how they did things before and after the arrival of the service. A simple question can be used to get people talking. For example, "How has the opening (or closing) of the factory affected family life?" or "How has the garden project started by the extension office affected your family?" Many issues will emerge from the discussion. Help learners identify and write about one of the issues.

Stories can be the beginning of a much longer learning process. Important issues identified in the observations and stories can be developed into continuing education lessons for classes, workshops and meetings. Such stories are a good way to help people discuss changes that are happening in their world. Comparing grandparent's stories of how things used to be with current community events and changes provides an opportunity for discussing how to help families deal with change. Discussing the differences between the experiences of the different generations can also help to bridge understanding between generations.

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- What issues or themes are in the stories?
- Do the stories have lessons to teach about values and behavior?
- What is the relationship between family stories of the past and family experiences of today?
- How can a discussion of the stories and the current situation be used in your family literacy program?

Here is one way that stories were used in a Family Literacy Program for Cambodian refugee families living in the United States. The mothers were having difficulty disciplining their children because the practices for disciplining children in the U.S. schools are very different from
Cambodia. The mothers visited the children’s school and observed classroom activities. Then they drew pictures and told stories about schooling in Cambodia. They used their stories and pictures to compare their experience of schooling in Cambodia with their children’s experience with schooling in the U.S. Telling stories about school in Cambodia was just one piece of the literacy lesson. Discussing the differences between Cambodian and U.S. schools was very important for the mothers as well as the teachers to be able to help the children improve their behavior at school and at home, and to help the mothers understand how learning is guided in U.S. schools.

**Collecting Reading Materials from Community Organizations:** Mapping the institutions and service agencies in a community is a good opportunity to find out more about what they do. Many of them will have educational and promotional materials for their customers and clients. In addition, they will have forms and record keeping procedures which everyone must follow when they come in for services. These written materials are an important source of reading materials for literacy lessons. They can also be collected and analyzed to find out if their style and vocabulary are appropriate for low-level readers.

A group of learners or family members may want to learn about a particular topic and a community agency may have information that will be useful to them. You or the learners can visit the agency to collect materials and invite someone to visit your class to provide useful information. If materials are too difficult for the learners to read, you can work with them to summarize and simplify the materials. For more detailed information on how to do this, see the strategy for finding and simplifying materials in the Whole Language Manual in this Action-Learning Series.

**Using Community Maps as an Organizing Tool**

Drawing and discussing the community maps will reveal problems families have in getting services. You can use the map activity to initiate a strategy to improve services in the community where you work. The family literacy program can sponsor meetings or invite agency staff to visit literacy classes so that they can explain their services and answer questions. You can also organize group visits to the organization.

For example, if a group of parents are concerned about their children’s health, they could plan to meet and discuss their questions. Then with the help of their literacy class facilitator, they could arrange to visit a health clinic or invite a health worker to class to answer their questions and teach them about preventive health care. Following the visit, they can practice reading materials and notes from the session. They can also develop some easy to read health posters for their homes to teach their children about good food and sanitation, etc.

The following questions may be useful in organizing activities.

1. What kinds of services are available in the community?

2. Which kinds of community organizations do family members have access to?
3. What problems do family members have when they try to access the services of organizations in their community?

4. What literacy and educational skills do each of the family members need in order to succeed in their community?

5. How do family members help each other by sharing information or resources from the community institutions and services which they are able to access?

6. What kind of people are available in the natural support system for the family and community you mapped?

**ACTION PLANNING**

Think about what you would like to achieve in your literacy program. What are some ways that you can use the activity, “Drawing Community Maps” as a way to start an inquiry and learning process?
Activity #6: Access Analysis

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to help learners analyze family and community situations in terms of who has access to community resources. The suggestions include a model for organizing a participatory action research project to address the problems affecting those who do not have access to community resources and learning opportunities. This activity combines inquiry, learning and organizing into a larger research project for the purpose of promoting positive social change for families and communities.

In the previous activity, you learned how to explore a community from the perspective of a family. You identified which family members interacted with which community resources and organizations. As you study your community map more closely, you will possibly discover that some family members have more community interaction than others. Each family will have its own configuration of interactions between family members and the community. Families divide the household labor and outside interactions according to gender, age and ability. The critical questions for family literacy are: Do all family members have access to opportunities in the community that will help them develop individually? Do all family members have an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the family by linking with resources and organizations outside the home? These questions guide us to a fundamental goal of family literacy.

Every family member should have access to opportunities to develop skills and tools that they can use both inside and outside the home.

Sometimes certain family members do not get equal opportunities. A common problem of inequality in the family occurs when only men and boys have access to opportunities and get recognition for bringing resources into the home. Age and physical or mental disability can also cause a family member to be overlooked or not valued for the contributions they make to the family.

Access to community resources is not only an internal family problem. Social circumstances can affect the entire family because of social class, caste or ethnic group. The entire family may be excluded from access to certain community opportunities. Solutions to family access depend on the circumstances. Sometimes the solution can take the form of a family literacy activity for a family or group of families. Other times, it may take long-term research, workshops, analysis and the action of the whole community or even society to bring about changes in the opportunities for people to access community resources.

Procedure

Participatory action research (PAR) is a type of research that a group undertakes in order to change institutional and social practices that are unjust. PAR involves all aspects of
inquiry, learning and organizing for action. For example, a group of disabled women in El Salvador did inquiry into the employment laws for disabled people. From their research, they found out that they had been discriminated against when seeking employment. After writing letters and talking to different civil rights activists and lawyers, they found ways to exercise the rights they had under the law. The group’s research activities looked like this:

1. They began an informal discussion group to talk about issues affecting them as disabled women in their country. (inquiry)

2. Together, they decided what kinds of action they could possibly take. They began by writing letters to ministries and government officials. Since many of the women could not write for either physical reasons or because they were illiterate, the women had assistance. A facilitator wrote on flipchart paper the information that the group wanted to write in their letter. The ones that were able, copied the letter on paper and signed their names. The women that could not write had other women write their letters and they signed an “X”. (learning and developing literacy skills)

3. The women also invited lawyers and disability activists to speak to their group. They prepared questions as a group in advance and chose a few to act as moderators during the session. They took notes and taped the sessions so that they would have the information to use later. (inquiry)

4. The women found out that there were government documents that disabled people could take to job interviews to inform employers of their legal rights. They went to government offices and demanded copies. (action) A few of the women worked with the disability activists to use the information from these legal documents to create easy-to-read materials that could be distributed to disabled people through a newsletter. (learning and developing literacy skills)

5. Some of the women went to visit workshops for the deaf to share the information they had gathered. (organizing)

6. A small group began making appointments with government officials to talk about ways in which they could monitor to see if existing laws were being followed. (organizing)

7. As a result of the women’s efforts, the Ministry of Planning has begun adapting and using the materials the women’s group developed. (social change)

Using the Access Interview as an Inquiry Tool

The purpose of this inquiry activity is to analyze a family situation in terms of who has access to which community resources. The interviewing process will enable you to collect information and identify people who may want to be involved in a PAR activity. To do the inquiry, you will need to talk to people who do not have the access they want to certain
community resources. You can do the interviews yourself as advance preparation for a PAR activity, or you can involve a small group of learners or people from your organization or community to help do the interviews. In either case, you will interview the affected individuals as well as other members of their family including the head of the household concerning their attitudes toward issues of access to resources in the family as well as with community organizations.

When interviewing, it is important to make the person you are interviewing feel comfortable and relaxed. Begin by explaining why you are conducting the interview and what kinds of information you hope to get. Remember to tell the person you are interviewing that at any time during the interview, they may ask you to stop if they are feeling uncomfortable. Finally, try to make the interview as much like a conversation as possible by encouraging the person to also ask you questions. The following guidelines may be helpful in organizing your interviews.

**Interview Guidelines - Community Access**

1. Find out and write a short description of the individual and family situation.

2. Ask the individual what places or resources are difficult to access.
   - What are some of the places you can’t get to or services you can’t use?
   - What are some of the reasons you can’t get access?
   - How do you feel about not having access to these community resources?

3. Talk to the head of the household and other family members. What are their opinions and insights?

4. What is your own opinion of the situation?

5. Is this problem internal to the family or is it a community or societal problem?

After you have completed the interviews, you can compile the information and use the following questions to guide your analysis.

1. Which individuals or families do not have access to community organizations?

2. Which reasons are preventing certain families or family members from having access to community resources? age, gender, disability, social class, caste, ethnic group, other?

3. What is the attitude of other family members toward the person who does not have access to community resources? What is the attitude of the community?

4. What are the barriers to gaining access to community resources? Is the main problem within the family attitudes, within the community or within the society?
5. What ideas do you have for family literacy activities that can help the family members without access change their situation? (Would you need to organize your activity inside the family or within the community?)

6. What community organizations can you work with to help solve the problems of access to resources?

Using the Access Interviews as a Learning Tool

Information from the access interviews can be used as the basis for literacy learning activities. You can help the learners and families find and read important information. You can also help them discuss and analyze the information and prepare their own written materials. A few ideas are listed below.

**Discussion:** The first step to understanding the problems uncovered by the interviews is to bring people together to discuss the issues in depth and decide what to do about the lack of access for family members and people in the community in order to decide how to proceed with a participatory action research strategy. It may take more than one or two sessions to clarify the issues and come to a common understanding. Like the women in El Salvador, you may want to invite experts from the community to your discussions to answer questions and provide additional information.

**Writing:** Many kinds of writing activities can evolve from the discussions. Writing petitions, letters, personal stories, and newsletters are good ways to get the information out to a broader audience. The PAR project provides the reason and motivation to write. The literacy class provides the instruction and support to help the learners and their families write effective materials.

**Reading:** The literacy class can also help the families learn about the issues and laws by providing instruction and support for finding, simplifying and reading difficult documents, forming study groups, and sharing the information about the lack of access or ways in which to change existing conditions.

**Action:** As a result of the inquiry, discussion, reading and writing, the families, group or individuals may identify ways to take action by sharing stories, sending letters, circulating petitions, etc. In the case of the women in El Salvador, because they were calling attention to the issue of job discrimination by writing letters and holding information sessions, newspapers found out and began running stories in the paper and interviewing disability activists and employers.

Using an Access Analysis as an Organizing Tool

**Family Support:** Solutions to the problems of access to resources may lie in the family or in the community or both, depending on the situation. You can use information from the inquiry and learning activities to help family members become more supportive of each other.
You can do this by helping them understand the differing abilities of each member, helping them organize a support system and encouraging them to work together to solve problems they are facing.

Groups: You can also use information from the inquiry and learning activities to address problems at the community level. You can do this by organizing committees to address problems, and by setting up study groups, action groups and advocacy groups to challenge barriers and promote positive change in the community.

Workshops: Family Literacy programs can offer workshops to teach community members how to write clear simple informative materials to educate beginning readers and all community members about issues of access. They can also offer workshops on how to organize meetings or workshops to raise awareness about barriers certain groups face.

ACTION PLANNING

Think about what you would like to achieve with your family literacy program. What are some ways that you can address issues of access in your community?
ACTIVITY #7: HOPES & FEARS DISCUSSION

PURPOSE

Literacy and education are often called tools for empowerment. Family literacy research has shown that literacy skills not only empower people, but they can change the power dynamics within a family. For example, when children of illiterate parents learn to read and write, they gain access to ideas and information that their parents don’t have. This gives the children more power than they would have in a traditional home. In some families, children use this power to assist the whole family to gain more resources in the community. In other cases, children misuse this power. For example, one Cambodian father in the United States described how he had to depend on his son to explain all the letters from the school. He did not learn until six months after the fact that his son had been expelled from school for misbehavior. As a father, he felt he no longer had the ability to guide his son’s education and moral development.

On the other hand, literacy education has also given women the courage and skills to leave an abusive husband and dare to support the children on their own. Although such action certainly disrupts a traditional family structure, with the proper community support the long-term results may be positive for everyone involved. Family literacy has the potential to help families solve problems or work through a crisis situation. The purpose of this activity is to help you identify some of the problems and opportunities that may arise when family members are empowered with literacy skills so that you can organize helpful family literacy support systems.

PROCEDURE

This activity can be done with individuals or small groups. It simply involves asking literacy learners and family members to talk and write about their hopes and fears related to education and learning to read and write. The purpose of the activity is to help people to think and talk about their hopes and fears for the future in order to find out what they see as potential opportunities and problems. You can design interviews and discussion starters using these questions and adding your own questions.

— What changes do you expect in the future?
— What hopes do you have for yourselves, your children and grandchildren?
— What are your concerns or fears for yourself, your children and grandchildren?
— What skills and education will you, your children and grandchildren need to live in the future?

For older people, you may want to start by asking what changes they have seen in their lifetime.

— What information from your lifetime would you like your children and grandchildren to know?
— Do the children still listen to the old stories and knowledge?
— Can written records help preserve their knowledge for future generations?
Using the Hopes and Fears Discussion as an Inquiry Tool

An important part of your work in the community is understanding what peoples needs are, what their dreams are for the future and their families. The Hopes and Fears Discussion is an inquiry tool to help you be a better practitioner, helping you to better understand the people you are working with. With your learners, you can use this discussion to help you develop deeper understanding of and meaningful solutions to social problems in order to improve the situation in families and communities.

Using the Hopes and Fears Discussion as a Learning Tool

An important part of literacy skills development is building personal confidence and motivation. The self-esteem and confidence of the learners is directly related to their ability to learn. Therefore, it is important for people to discuss their hopes and fears about their lives and their desires for education.

Writing activities can be based on the discussions of hopes and fears. A group can make a list of ways to achieve their hopes or to solve common problems. Learners can also express their feelings in writing. Some teachers have used the hopes and fears exercise to encourage people to write poems and stories or even personal action plans.

Using the Hopes and Fears Discussion as an Organizing Tool

The interviews, discussions and learning activities will give you ideas for different ways a family literacy program can provide support to families. Here are a few ways that programs can organize support.

**Family Sharing:** Encourage individual family members to share their hopes for education or improving their life with each other. Adults and children can learn about each other’s hopes and fears. Many families suffer because hopes and fears are never spoken. It may be difficult for some family-members to express what they feel. Men may not feel that they can express fears in front of others. You must be very sensitive about how you carry out this activity, but it can be a good learning experience for both you and family members.

**Support Group:** A group of people who are learning together can form an informal support group when they know something of the personal hopes and fears of group members. Those with similar hopes can help each other reach their dreams. Those with similar fears can help each other to overcome the problems. Again, this activity should be used with cultural sensitivity to build a team spirit among group members.

**Homework Clubs:** Adults should be aware of the hopes and fears that children have about school. Homework clubs can be organized to help students overcome their fears of doing poorly in school and to achieve their hopes to do well.
**Ice-Breaker Activity:** A workshop may be the first organized educational experience for many family members. The facilitator can use this activity or individual interviews to help each of the participants feel comfortable to come and learn at the workshop.

**Advance Preparation:** A community meeting may also be a first experience for many families. You should be aware of this and talk to people about their hopes and fears before they come together for the meeting. This will help people feel more confident to speak up in the meeting.

**ACTION PLANNING**

What would you like to achieve in your literacy program? What are some ways you would like to use the “Hopes and Fears” activity?
DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT A FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM

To plan your literacy program, you first need to analyze the resources and abilities of your organization. The goals of your organization will help you determine what type of literacy activities are most relevant to the areas of life that your organization addresses. Due to the focus of your program, you may need to choose whether your literacy program will focus on helping people use their literacy skills for personal and home-related activities or for interacting and dealing with issues in the larger community.

For example, if you work for a community-based adult education program, you may have the flexibility to build your program directly from the needs and interests of the adult learners and help them develop the skills they need to use reading and writing at home and in the community. You may focus activities on family histories, family records, and the publication of family stories. But, if you work for a health center, you may need to focus your program on mothers and children by developing materials for family health records and child-development activities such as a baby-book and mother’s sharing group. However, it is important to keep in mind that individuals and their families devote time to all aspects of life and therefore have needs and interests that are much broader than the specialization of your organization.

The following questions are designed to help you think about the goals of your organization and how literacy activities might enable you to better serve individuals and their families.

1. What is the purpose of your organization?
2. Which family members does your organization already serve? (school children, mothers, babies, husbands, wives)
3. Which family members would your organization like to include in your family literacy activity?
4. How can the family literacy activities help your organization better reach its goals?
5. How can the family literacy activities help your organization better understand the families it serves?
6. What ideas do you have for using the family literacy activities?
Glossary of Key Concepts

**Access:** to know about and be able to find and receive the services of a community institution

**Action-learning:** a learning strategy that combines elements of participatory action research and participatory curriculum development to design literacy materials and learning activities (Action-learning includes three activities: inquiry, learning and organizing.)

**Analyze:** a process of organizing information into categories and asking questions to make sense of what is happening. (Organizing information on charts is one way to begin analysis.)

**Co-Researcher:** family members and people from the community who participate in collecting and analyzing information for a family literacy activity

**Community Literacy:** the kinds of reading, writing and analyzing skills that people and organizations in a community need in order to communicate with each other and meet the needs of daily life. (Community Literacy includes local knowledge and community traditions as well as modern forms of printed and written materials.)

**Diagram:** a drawing that uses symbols, lines and pictures to show relationships between things and people

**Disability:** a mental or physical handicap

**Family Literacy:** the role literacy plays in family life both at home and in the community. (It includes how every family member uses—or needs to use—reading and writing to accomplish everyday tasks. It also includes guiding children to learn about life and preparing them to read and write and participate in school and other community activities.)

**Gender:** the sex of a person—either male or female. (In family literacy it is important to examine differences between literacy opportunities and responsibilities for males and females.)

**Inquiry:** a kind of small scale, practical research that provides information for local analysis and use by systematically collecting, organizing and analyzing information that is around us every day

**Kinship Chart:** a diagram showing blood relationships as well as marriage and adoptive relationships between family members. (Charts or family trees can also include ancestors who have died.)

**Literacy Practice:** a new reading and writing activity that can be introduced in the home or community for practical use in daily life
Participation: to actively join in an activity, discussion or event (Family literacy involves all family members on the assumption that people learn best through participating or joining in the learning activity.)

Participatory Action Research (PAR): a process where research, planning and action as well as inquiry, learning and organizing are connected to bring about positive social change (Family literacy relies on the PAR process to research, plan and create new learning programs with families and communities.)

Participatory Curriculum Development: a process where the facilitator involves the learners in deciding what to learn, collecting and organizing local knowledge, creating many of their own reading materials and jointly evaluating their progress

Practitioner-Researcher: a practitioner or teacher who uses research to analyze and design educational experiences

Research: collecting information and organizing it in a systematic way to gain new insights and deeper understanding
Suggestions for Additional Reading


The Literacy Linkage Program is a collaborative effort of the Center for International Education, School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, U.S.A. and the Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.