

**Supporting Evidence-Based Early Literacy Development Through Home-based  
Projects: A Collaborative Research Project  
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**Abstract**

This presentation will describe a year-long study where researchers, Head Start teachers, and families worked together to create monthly, home projects based on an evidence-based curriculum project (CSS+). We will describe the collaborative process and ongoing data collection that guided us in partnering with practitioners and families to support the early literacy development of all children, including those with disabilities.

**Rationale for Project**

Early literacy skills acquired before the first grade remain highly predictive of later school achievement and involvement in special education services (Duncan et al., 2007; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). There is growing evidence of the type of instruction and intervention that fosters literacy development, including the significant role that family involvement has in supporting and sustaining growth (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). In turn, it is critical to promote the development of evidence-based activities that bridge classroom and home contexts. This appears particularly important for children from low-income families who often display significantly less early literacy skills than their middle class peers (Dickinson, et al., 2006; Torgesen, 1998).

**Context of This Project**

This study emerged from a larger, IES Goal 2 project entitled Children's School Success Plus (CSS+), in which twelve preschool teachers in three different states are working with researchers to redesign and implement a comprehensive curriculum that includes early literacy activities (Horn, Palmer, Lieber, & Butera, 2010). More information on CSS+ can be found on the project's website (<http://www2.ku.edu/~cssplus/>)

**Research Process**

In order to inform the family component of the curriculum, families within one site (n = 213) were asked to describe their beliefs and practices about early literacy (Friesen & Butera, 2011). The results indicated that while families wanted their children to acquire early literacy skills, they were uncertain what this specifically entailed and heavily relied on Head Start to foster this development. Further, the expertise of families and existing literacy practices were not valued as a means to provide meaningful family involvement and literacy development.

Using this information, we sought to design home-based projects that provided information/activities about important early literacy skills, were connected to the CSS+ curriculum, and continued to be informed by ongoing feedback from teachers and families. Further, the eight projects designed sought to be meaningful to families and provide

opportunities to use their own expertise. Each project included options, necessary materials, and ample time to complete. Specific examples of the projects that were designed and used throughout the year will be described within the presentation.

### Lessons Learned

The ongoing feedback from families and teachers provided us with opportunities to reflect on the projects and consider how to improve upon them. Families shared their appreciation for the opportunity to spend time with their child and see what they were learning about at school. The projects that were best received by the families and teachers were hands-on and provided choices. While we included a focus on specific early literacy skills within each project, we know we can do this more sequentially and provide clearer explanations to families and teachers. We also can continue to think of ways to engage families' in the classroom and acknowledge their expertise. In the presentation, we will share how we used these lessons to inform the revision and expansion of the CSS+ Family Literacy Projects

### References

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### For More Information

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