

## SPELL Environmental Scan and Literature Review Findings

### Environmental Scan

Our research project began with an exploration of current programs that are successful in reaching parents of children birth through three and changing their behaviors in positive ways to benefit their children in the short and long terms. In addition to researching organizations nationally, we sent out a survey on several listservs over a two-week period to learn about examples of practices, programs and partnerships with other agencies that have been found to be successful (or not successful) in engaging and supporting parents in their role in building early literacy.

While low-income families are the focus of our project, we are interested in efforts in many types of communities. We are especially interested in programs that have been able to perform evaluations or program assessments.

Ten patterns emerged from programs that have shown to be effective in engaging target audiences and promoting behavioral change (follow links for examples of successful programs that use these techniques):

1. **Expectant Mothers:** Pregnancy is the ideal time to reach and educate mothers with early childhood messages since they have the intrinsic motivation to do what is best for their unborn child and they have a purpose larger than themselves, e.g. their child's health and well-being. At this stage, you are attempting to promote generational change and break the cycle of the effects of poverty.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/expectant-mothers.html>
2. **Sustained Effort over Time:** The effort needs to be supportive, regular, and sustained over an established period of time. Establishing a routine takes sustained practice. This allows the organizations to develop longer-term relationships with the participants.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/sustained-effort-over-time.html>
3. **Active Involvement:** The participant needs to be *actively* involved in the process. The participant must have control and the ability to make his or her own choices. The participant decides if they have the capacity to do the behavioral change.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/active-involvement.html>
4. **Partnerships:** The programs have partnerships with multiple organizations.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/partnerships.html>
5. **Assessments:** Evaluations or assessment data is available showing a history of success at changing parental behaviors.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/assessments.html>

6. **Individual Attention:** The participants work one-on-one with the professional in a mutually-respectful relationship.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/individual-attention.html>
7. **Group Dynamic:** The participants are part of a supportive group with all working towards the same goals.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/group-dynamic.html>
8. **Cultural Proficiency:** The program respects and accommodates other cultures.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/cultural-proficiency.html>
9. **Work through Existing Infrastructures:** The program understands that they can reach families effectively through existing infrastructures where families already have long-standing relationships with trusted advisers.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/existing-infrastructures.html>
10. **Fun or Gaming Element:** Including a gaming element makes the learning into a fun challenge.  
<http://spellproject.weebly.com/fun-or-gaming-element.html>

### **Literature Review**

In the second phase of SPELL, we examined literature in these subject and practice areas:

- Librarianship
- Early childhood education
- Language and literacy acquisition
- Family partnerships, related to:
  - Health
  - Intervention
  - Literacy

We reviewed these types of literature:

- Professional and scholarly journals
- Dissertations and theses
- Government agency reports
- Handbooks and guidelines

One major topic examined was **Families**. The literature review revealed these patterns of studies:

- Research on families:

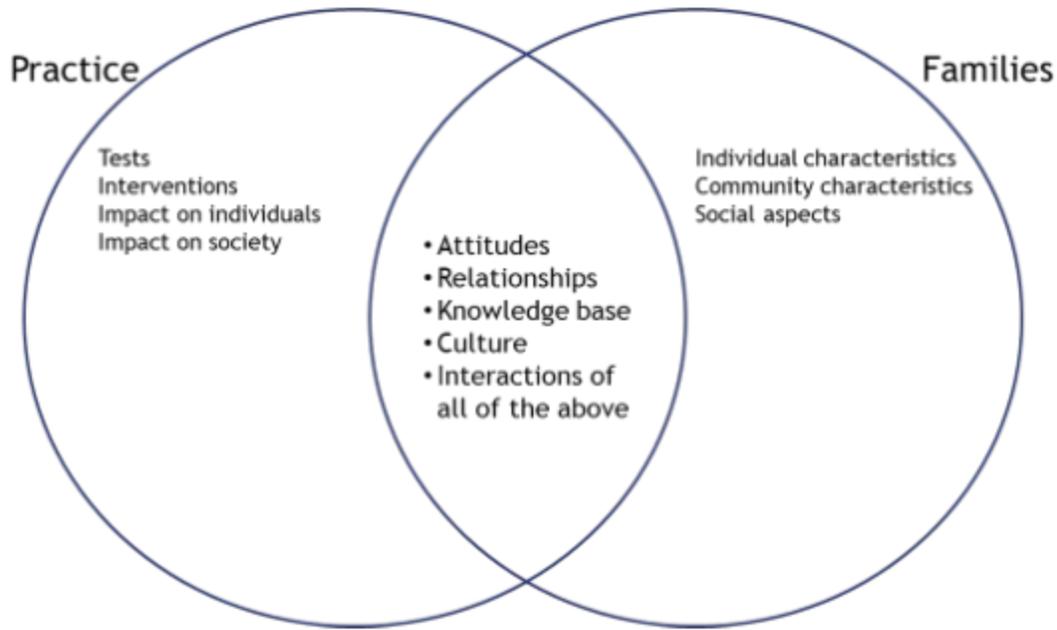
- Attitudes
- Practices
- Interaction of attitudes and practices
- Knowledge base
- Characteristics
- Guidelines and tips for and about Families:
  - Advocacy
    - Individual needs
    - Community needs
  - Where to find resources
  - Accountability of government

A second major topic of the literature review concerned **Early Childhood Professionals**. Their review revealed these patterns of studies:

- Research about Early Childhood Professionals:
  - Testing
  - Interventions
  - Attitudes
  - Roles and Relationships
    - Organizational
    - Interpersonal
  - Impact
    - Individuals
    - Society

### **Overarching Concepts in the Literature**

We found important concepts in the literature that crossed both research on families and early childhood professionals:



These overlapping concepts are the primary focus areas that SPELL will investigate in the next two phases of the project, our surveys and focus groups. These concepts are:

Attitudes:

- Importance of early literacy
- Likelihood of interacting with various support providers
- Family's influence and role

Relationships:

- Trust in various support providers
- Family roles

Knowledge base:

- What is already known
- How has knowledge been used

Culture:

- Barriers
- Preferences for means of interacting with providers