

Literacy on the Move



OCTOBER 2006

The Political Economy of Early Child Development and Family Literacy

By Askin Taner, OLC Public Policy Analyst

BY INTEGRATING EXPERTISE from the fields of adult literacy, and early child development (ECD), family literacy programs enhance the ability of parents to support their pre-school children as they develop pre-literacy skills.¹ In this issue of the newsletter, the OLC explores and highlights issues related to family literacy. Below, we start by discussing some of the political and economic implications.



Why should we care about ECD, and by extension, family literacy? There have been important new developments in our understanding of the significance of early childhood and the effects on health, learning, and behaviour in later stages of life.

Recent molecular and cellular research regarding the impact of early childhood environment on biological processes in adulthood now provide us with much more than statistical evidence. Studies on brain 'plasticity', the stress system, and serotonin metabolism provide clear accounts of the causal mechanisms involved. Today, we know a good deal about how experience-based brain and biological development in the early years differentiates neuron functions, and how it influences the development of sensing pathways, neuron connections and pathways in the

brain. These translate into direct influences on health, learning, literacy, and indeed behaviour throughout the life cycle. This recent body of research in natural sciences gives a substantial boost to economic and political arguments for ECD initiatives.

Traditionally, arguments for supporting ECD initiatives have been based upon notions of social justice. These are politically based ideas, and they can be traced back to both left and right wing ideologies such as socialism, and the Christian democratic tradition. The economic argument for supporting ECD initiatives is based on the notion of efficient allocation of resources. By addressing issues of social justice while simultaneously promoting economic productivity, a policy framework for ECD carries the potential to generate support from across the political spectrum. These developments have led many leading international experts to make policy recommendations, to governments across the world, which emphasize the crucial need to teach parents how to provide an enriching environment for their children.

Most politicians, policy makers and even many academics subscribe to the conventional wisdom that formal educational institutions play a central role in the production of skills required by the modern economy. According to Nobel Laureate economist **James Heckman**, however, the **return on investment (ROI)** from money spent on ECD is much greater for both individuals and society as a whole than money spent on formal education.² The ROI ratio in formal education is about three to one in contrast to at least eight to one for ECD

programs, excluding the effects of early child development on physical and mental health in adult life.³ Using findings from studies carried out in the United States (US) including such longitudinal projects as the *Abecedarian Project*, the *Chicago Child Parent Center Project*, and the *Perry Preschool Program*, Heckman provides specific examples of his argument regarding ROI from ECD.⁴ From a political perspective, Heckman's recent research on the benefits of investing in children from disadvantaged sections of society is particularly important. In the US, his findings have started drawing attention from centres of power across the political spectrum.⁵

Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Econometrics of the University of Amsterdam, **Jacques van der Gaag** also makes a strong case for the economic benefits of ECD initiatives speaking to its intrinsic link with human development.⁶ His analysis suggests—that certain critical *pathways* link ECD to human development.⁷ The 'education pathway' is straightforward and abundantly documented by scientific evidence. Like education, the health pathway from ECD to human development is clear, although surprisingly, most of the studies linking health to economic growth are recent, and additional research is needed to understand more fully the economic impact of ECD on health. Van der Gaag finds the recently acquired empirical evidence on other socio-economic benefits of ECD equally convincing; longitudinal studies point at the indirect economic effects such as improved self-esteem, social competence, motivation, and reduced criminal behaviour. Founding President and Fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, **Fraser Mustard** provides a comprehensive review of specific studies analyzing the links between ECD and human development, particularly regarding improvements in public health and reduction in violent behaviour.⁸

Today's business leaders see that ECD initiatives are crucial for economic competitiveness, and a worthwhile investment. A December 2005 poll of business leaders in the United States shows that more than 80 per cent agree that public funding of voluntary pre-kindergarten programs for all children would improve

America's workforce. The influential magazine *The Economist* put forward a parallel argument in a 1998 article. According to the magazine, the principle of free education for school-age children is already entrenched throughout the Western world, and that there would be nothing politically or economically controversial about extending it further down the age range.⁹ Canada's business elites also advocate enhancement of ECD. They are taking important steps in supporting ECD by lobbying federal, provincial and municipal governments for more action, as well as providing leadership and initiating corporate/business action. The work of RBC Financial Group Foundation in supporting ECD constitutes an important and promising example.¹⁰

According to Mustard, ECD initiatives will influence the quality of our society in 20 to 25 years: "Failure to act now could mean a failure to raise the quality of our population, weakening our future competitiveness in a globalized economy characterized by exponential growth in knowledge and technology."¹¹ In Mustard's view, investing effectively in ECD initiatives will cost more money than Canada currently spends.¹² An important point raised by Mustard is that, countries that have put such programs in place at least partially finance them.¹³ He argues that Canada has not yet put in place an effective policy framework: "A number of our provincial governments now have ministries concerned with child development, but they have yet to become mainstream in the same sense as ministries of education and health."¹⁴

The Government of Ontario is currently in the process of developing *Best Start*, a long-term ECD strategy that will be implemented in the next ten years.¹⁵ As part of this umbrella strategy, Ontario Early Years Centres offer learning and literacy programs for parents and their children.¹⁶ In May 2005, the province signed an agreement with the federal government to fund 25,000 new licensed child care spaces by 2007–08 in Ontario. Regrettably, the new federal government has terminated this agreement, taking away \$1.4 billion intended for child care spaces and fee subsidies for working families. Without sustained federal support, the Ontario Government is unlikely to move aggressively with its Best Start strategy.¹⁷

Because most of the benefits of ECD initiatives such as family literacy programs are longer term while the costs of mounting such programs are more immediate, political systems tend to be biased against making such investments.¹⁸ “But any business that operated in this way would likely fail to succeed. A similarly dim prospect may be in store for a country that fails to take advantage of such solid investment opportunities.”¹⁹ In the US, policy makers have recently displayed negative attitudes toward certain family literacy programs partially because of the complex and costly nature of the performance evaluations of such programs. Such evaluations must include longitudinal studies on the progress of all family participants for effective and accurate measurement.²⁰

There are, however, encouraging success stories such as that of the United Kingdom. (UK). Since 1997, the UK Government has invested unprecedented levels of resources to achieve fundamental change in ECD programs, although only after considerable political debate and controversy. According to Beverley

Hughes, Minister of State (Children, Young People and Families) for the UK, the key to the government’s success was the policy design based on the principle of *progressive universalism*. This principle is based upon the universal provision of ECD programs—to virtually all 4 year olds and about 96% of 3 year olds in the UK—within which there is a targeted focus on disadvantaged children.²¹

Canada needs to take ECD much more seriously. We need to provide political support for ECD initiatives that offer quality programs including family literacy programs. Adequate and sustained funding for such initiatives will be crucial if we are to achieve political and social goals such as reducing the proportion of the population in poverty, improving equity in literacy and income, enhancing upward mobility, reducing violence, and improving public health. Simultaneously, the long-term impact of ECD initiatives such as family literacy will translate into significant public and private economic benefits, with returns far exceeding the costs.

References

1. Cellan Jay, *Making the Connections: Family Literacy, Adult Literacy, and Early Childhood Development*. A project prepared for the Ontario Literacy Coalition, April 2003.
2. Here formal education refers to all stages of schooling from kindergarten to post-secondary institutions.
3. James Heckman, “Policies to Foster Human Capital” *Research in Economics*, vol: 54, no: 1, 2000. www.jcpr.org/wpfiles/Wildavsky.pdf?CFID=2995218&CFTOKEN=72919214 (September 2006)
4. James J. Heckman and Dimitriy V. Masterov, “The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children” Working Paper 5, *Invest in Kids Working Group, Committee for Economic Development*, October 4, 2004. jenni.uchicago.edu/Invest/FILES/dugger_2004-12-02_dvm.pdf (September 2006)
5. James Heckman, “Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children is an Economically Efficient Policy” presented at the Forum on *Building the Economic Case for Investments in Preschool*, New York, January 10, 2006. www.ced.org/docs/report/report_2006prek_heckman.pdf (September 2006)
6. In Van der Gaag’s framework, “human development” refers to the development of skills and abilities as used in employment and in other types of contributions to the economy—but at the scale of a nation.
7. Jacques van der Gaag, “From Child Development to Human Development” The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, 2003. www.ecdgroup.com/pdfs/van_der_gaag_paper_CHILDDDEV-20_05_2003-18_13_22.pdf (September 2006)
8. Fraser Mustard, “Early Child Development and Experience-based Brain Development: The Scientific Underpinnings of the Importance of Early Child Development in a Globalized World” The Brookings Institution, February 2006. www.brookings.edu/views/papers/200602mustard.pdf (September 2006)
9. The Economist, “Balancing Act” *Survey: Women and Work*. July 16th 1998.
10. The leadership displayed by RBC Executive Vice President Charlie Coffey in various ECD initiatives deserves to be mentioned in this context.
11. Fraser Mustard, “Who knows how to build a future?” *The Globe and Mail* June 22, 2004. www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20040622/COMUS22 (September 2006)
12. Fraser Mustard, “Early Child Development and Experience-based Brain Development”
13. Fraser Mustard, “Who knows how to build a future?”
14. Ibid.
15. www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/BestStart/default.htm (September 2006)
16. For more on the family literacy programming component of this strategy please see: Ontario Literacy Coalition, “The State of Family Literacy in Ontario: The Results of a Provincial Survey” Toronto, 2006.
17. For more on Best Start please see the website of Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services: www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/BestStart/default.htm (September 2006)
18. Dickens, W.T., I. Sawhill and J. Tebbis, “The Effects of Investing in Early Education on Economic Growth” *Brookings Working Paper*, The Brookings Institution, 2006. www.brookings.edu/views/papers/200604dickenssawhill.pdf (September 2006)
19. Ibid.
20. A good example is the *Even Start* Program which aims to improve educational opportunities for children and their parents in low-income areas by integrating early childhood education, adult education, and parenting education into “family literacy” programs. The current US administration has rated the program as ‘ineffective.’
21. Beverley Hughes, “Keynote Speech,” *US-UK Early Years Conference* the Grand Hyatt Hotel, New York, NY, January 10, 2006. www.ced.org/docs/trans_2006earlyedconf_hughes.pdf (September 2006).

Family Literacy in Schools

By Joanne Davis, Program Officer, Parenting Programs, Toronto District School Board

IN JUNE 2006 the Toronto District School Board's Parenting and Family Literacy Centres celebrated 25 years of programming. A pioneer in the field of family literacy programming, the TDSB has long recognised the significance of the early years and the importance of involving the parent in the child's learning prior to kindergarten entry. The 54 centres funded by the board connect 10,000 families to schools annually in the most needy, high-risk communities.

Based on the principles of adult learning and knowledge of child development, the centres offer a rich play-based environment that promotes literacy and numeracy learning in a relaxed and comfortable setting. Each Parenting Centre is located in an elementary school and is staffed by a Parent Worker who works with the principal as part of the school team.

Parents and caregivers with children from infants to 6 years of age can attend these free programs throughout the school year and are welcome to attend any time during program hours. Families can access resources at their convenience. Family literacy principles are an essential component of our daily programming and staff models the techniques of learning through play and offer a daily story and music time.

The parent is supported in his or her role as the child's first and most important teacher, becomes familiar with the school staff and builds effective relationships with their local school. Working in partnership with outside agencies, families are linked to the community resources they need, and early identification of developmental delays is a primary goal.

Building on the natural bond between parent and child, the Parent Worker facilitates a program that promotes adult-child interaction and encourages the parent to extend the learning in the home. Simple and inexpensive materials designed to develop literacy and numeracy skills are available for parents who wish to further prepare their children for school.



A multilingual book library is available to support first language reading.

The TDSB Parenting and Family Literacy Centres were used as a reference point in the *Early Years Study*, commissioned by the Ontario Government in 1999 and co-chaired by the Honourable Margaret Norrie McCain and Dr. Fraser Mustard. This report highlighted the importance of capitalising on the critical periods of brain development in young children by providing a nurturing and stimulating environment and the significant role of the parent.

Evidence based research reveals that early intervention can be an effective way of maximising a child's potential. It demonstrates the results that these programs have on developing literacy skills and the positive impact on families and children. By involving the parent in their child's learning at an early age and acknowledging the essential role they play, these centres are focused on levelling the playing field for all children thereby increasing their chances for academic success.

For more information about the programs mentioned in this story, visit www.tdsb.on.ca

Centre for Expertise in Family Literacy (CEFL) Conference

By Debbie Nesbitt-Munroe, Early Literacy Specialist, Kingston and the Islands

THE HALLWAYS OF QUEEN'S FACULTY of Education buzzed with animated conversation, people pored over stalls of exciting books and toys, and even late on Friday afternoon, peals of laughter could be heard from behind the closed doors of the main lecture hall. These are some of the sounds and sights that have remained in our memories from the Centre for Expertise in Family Literacy conference held in partnership with Queen's University, early last June.

This was the first family literacy conference to take place in the region. Months of planning for the conference, "*Family Literacy: Programming that Works*", were well rewarded by the fantastic response we had from 145 participants from all areas of Ontario. Although the original intention had been to attract people from Eastern Ontario, the conference clearly appealed to a wider audience. The furthest any attendee travelled was from New Brunswick, and several people came from New York State. This clearly indicates the desire of people involved in family literacy to meet and share information.

The conference was aimed at Adult and Family Literacy Practitioners, Early Childhood Educators, Ontario Early Years Staff and teachers from Eastern Ontario. People from all these professions came, but representatives from Public Health, Social Services and other interested community service providers also attended.

Keynote speakers were invited from British Columbia, Newfoundland and Toronto to share the programs they had devised based on well founded research in family literacy.



The programs chosen were, "From Lullabies to Literacy", "Parents As Literacy Supporters (PALS)" and "Parents Roles Interacting With Teacher Support (P.R.I.N.T.S.)." Each presenter addressed the entire conference on the first day, when each gave an overall view of their respective programs. On the second day, they provided a full day of training for those who wished to pursue the opportunity to learn more.

Seven shorter workshops were offered for those who were interested in greater variety. The topics were all related to excellence in family literacy including, "How to Identify and Support Pre-School Children At-Risk" and the description of a series of plain language English workshops for parents of elementary school children called, "Parents as Partners in Education".

Action for Family Literacy Ontario, a working group of the Ontario Literacy Coalition, described their work and presented the results of a recently completed environmental scan into the current state of family literacy in Ontario. The conference provided the perfect venue to share this important new information. In the evening, networking opportunities were provided during a social event at the Donald Gordon Centre.

The conference was an overwhelming success and an ideal opportunity for practitioners to learn more about excellent family literacy programming currently taking place in the region and across the country.

New Resources

By Maria Moriarty, Centre AlphaPlus Centre
1-800-728-1120 — www.alphaplus.ca

The following materials may be borrowed or purchased through AlphaPlus.

OLC ANNOTATIONS—FAMILY LITERACY

The AlphaPlus library has a strong Family Literacy collection. It includes resources on a wide range of topics, from recruitment and program planning to program activities and evaluation. Below is a small selection of recently published titles from the collection.

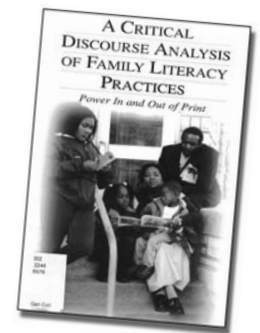
(You will find more annotated descriptions of Family Literacy resources from the AlphaPlus library in the latest AFLO newsletter)

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Family Literacy Practices

Rogers, R., Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum. 2003

Call no. **302.2244 R576**

Through an in-depth case study of one family, this book provides a fascinating and thought-provoking exploration of the complexities of family literacy. Using a variety of research techniques including participant-observation, ethnography, interviews, photography and document collection, the author explores the intricacies of issues of identity and power in relation to this family's use of language and literacy in the home and in the community.



Reaching Across the Barriers: Increasing outreach and participation in family and adult literacy programs.

Pross, T. and S. Barry, Kingston, Ont.: Kingston Literacy. 2004

Call no. **649.5806 P68**

An outline review of the literature on outreach and participation in family and adult literacy programs in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. The review describes and examines barriers to participation and describes promotional and outreach strategies to address challenges and support potential learners to overcome these barriers.



Effective Outreach Strategies from Kingston Literacy's Family Literacy Program

Barry, S., Kingston, Ont.: Kingston Literacy. 2004

Call no. **649.5806 B13**

A review of an effective outreach model for family literacy programs as developed by Kingston Literacy. The review includes a description of outreach activities undertaken by Kingston Literacy and outlines key components of an effective outreach strategy. The review highlights the importance of a comprehensive and well-thought outreach plan and a step-by-step program approach to reaching potential participants.

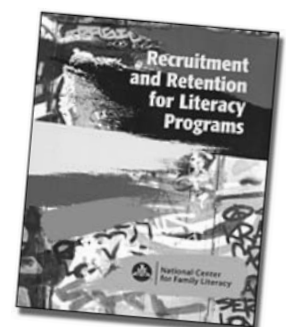


Recruitment and Retention for Literacy Programs.

Louisville, KY; National Center for Family Literacy. 2005

Call no. **374.01206 R239**

This guidebook is designed to jumpstart a literacy program's recruitment and retention efforts. The text contains many ideas used by actual programs that have sparked staff creativity.



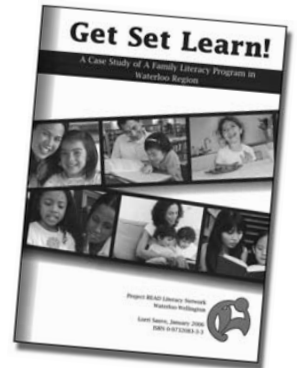
The guide addresses ways to involve staff, volunteers, the community, the media, and students themselves in both short-term and long-term recruitment and retention strategies. The guide also serves to facilitate staff and partner discussions about recruitment and retention strategies during regular literacy service planning meetings.

Get Set Learn!: A case study of a family literacy program in Waterloo Region

Sauvé, L., Kitchener, Ont.: Project Read, 2006

Call no. **649.58097 G26 S74**

A case study review of a successful family literacy program, Get Set Learn, designed and implemented by Project Read. The goal of the program was to address the literacy learning needs of parents of pre-school children who were Ontario Works clients, and to provide childcare and other supports to enable active participation in the program. The review details the successes and achievements of participants and outlines the strategies and supports to participants that contributed to the success of the program.

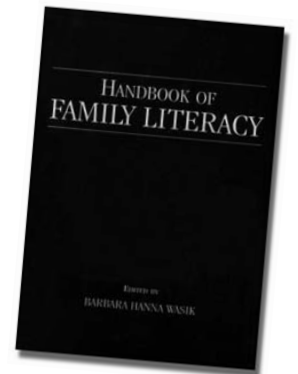


Handbook of Family Literacy

Wasik, B.H., Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004

Call no. **302.2244 H12**

The Handbook of Family literacy offers detailed introduction to the field of family literacy and also provides a comprehensive review of research theory and practice relevant to family literacy programs. With contributions from experts across the field of family literacy, this book provides a thorough and up to date picture of family literacy programming. The book provides a range of ideas and insights on a variety of issues from parent-child relationships to procedures for evaluating local family literacy programs.



Family literacy resources are also available online. Online resources include:

Family Literacy Research in the Adult Literacy Research in Ontario (ALRiO) web site

In ALRiO you will find the Family Literacy Research Pathfinder—a set of dynamic links to the latest information about family literacy research on the Internet.

For example:

Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network

A project led by Dr. Linda Philips of the Centre for Research on Literacy at the University of Alberta, that examines the efficacy of a family literacy program offered to preschoolers and their parents in Alberta.

www.nce.gc.ca/pubs/ncenet-telerce/spr2004/cllrnet-spr04_e.htm

Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy

This institute works in collaboration with the National Center for Family Literacy and the Institute for the study of Adult Literacy at the Pennsylvania State College to foster and support research in the area of family literacy. For an annotated biography of family literacy in the U.K., go to www.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute/index.html

Publications: Family Literacy

For a bibliography of family literacy research in the U.K. from the Literacy Research Centre at the University of Sheffield, go to www.shef.ac.uk/literacy/publications/family.html

To access the complete Family Literacy Research Pathfinder, go to: research.alphaplus.ca/familit.asp

Festival News

“...Too busy to hear myself think”

By Sheila Stewart, Coordinator, Festival of Literacies

DO YOU IDENTIFY? Does literacy work sometimes sap your energy and make it difficult to think about what you're doing and where you're going in your work? The Festival of Literacies offers on-line and face-to-face workshops on reflecting about literacy work that help literacy practitioners to hear themselves—and each other—think!

For example, we took part in Literacy Northwest's conference in Thunder Bay in May and led a workshop called *Hearing Ourselves Think, Hearing Each Other Think*. At the CESBA (Continuing Education School Board Administrators) spring conference on project proposals, we led a workshop on the questions to ask at the beginning of a research project. At the Labour Education Centre in Toronto, we led a discussion on learning circles as a tool for practitioner development in a workshop that brought together community and labour literacy people.

We have also been doing similar workshops on-line using Centra, attracting people from across the province. In June and September, we did a two-workshop series entitled *Reflecting About Literacy Work*. We are currently developing a second Centra series entitled *Yes, I Can Do This: Reflection to Action*.

This fall, we're hoping to do follow-up face-to-face workshops in Thunder Bay and at the Labour Education Centre, as well as a research-in-practice forum at Literacy South Central in London. We will also do a face-to-face workshop in Toronto in November that will be available to literacy practitioners throughout Ontario. For this workshop, we will be able to provide some help with travel and accommodation for participants who are coming from outside of the Golden Horseshoe area. Please watch out for information on our website www.literaciesoise.ca

It's exciting for the Festival of Literacies to move beyond Toronto and for us to learn more



Festival of Literacies
Festival de l'Alpha

about the concerns and interests of practitioners around the province. We look forward to working further with you, and invite you to contact us if you would like to get involved.

For more information, please contact Guy Ewing at guye@ca.inter.net or Joy Lehmann at jlehmann@idirect.ca. Thanks to the National Literacy Secretariat and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for their support.



Joy Lehmann and Bert Providence in animated discussion at the Labour Education Centre workshop

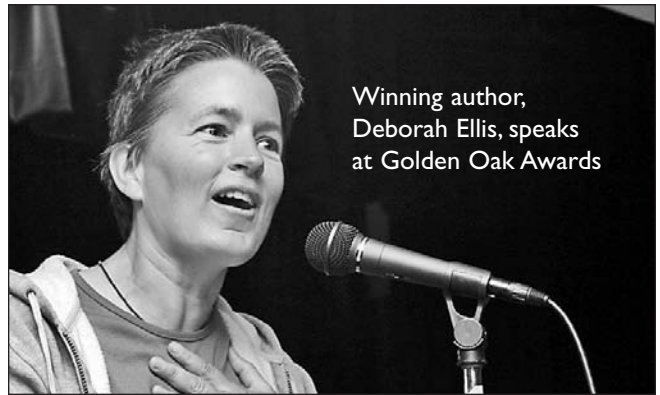
Heaven Shop Wins 2006 Golden Oak Award

By Mary Reynolds and Joan Robinson, Golden Oak Steering Committee

THE 2006 GOLDEN OAK AWARD was presented to Deborah Ellis, author of *The Heaven Shop*, at a gala luncheon on June 8th at the Toronto Public Library as part of a city-wide conference for adults in literacy programs. Sponsored by the Ontario Library Association, Golden Oak is a provincial book club for adult learners. Comments from learners determine who wins the award each year.

In *The Heaven Shop*, Binti is the star of a radio show in Malawi, Africa. Her life changes dramatically when her father dies from AIDS. Sent to live with uncaring relatives, Binti and her siblings must find their own way. This novel puts a very real face on the African AIDS pandemic which, to date, has orphaned more than 11 million children.

This year's master of ceremonies, a learner participant from Beat the Street Literacy Program, kept the capacity crowd of 260 participants and volunteers laughing while keeping the program on schedule. Deborah Ellis and Zelda Freedman, author of *Rosie's Dream*



Winning author, Deborah Ellis, speaks at Golden Oak Awards

Cape, spoke about their writing experiences, and encouraged learner participants to persevere and keep their reading and writing dreams alive.

Deborah Ellis was delighted to win the 2006 Golden Oak Award for *The Heaven Shop*, her second Golden Oak award. Deborah's first GO award was in 2004 for *Parvana's Journey*.

The 2007 Golden Oak Book Club is now underway. For information about this year's nominated titles and to register for the Book Club visit www.accessola.com/goldenoak

Learner's Corner

By Sandy Barnabé



Family involvement in literacy is so important. When there is a move to involve adults as well as children, it is great to see improvement in the skills of both groups. The potential is humongous. These programs can catch problems earlier and deal with them earlier. They are working with literacy but they are creating and supporting stronger families. The world wouldn't have so many problems if more early family literacy programs were available.

I and my young daughter have participated in several family literacy events including a Literacy Day celebration at her school. An author had come in to read some of her book to the children. Parents were invited to participate in the event.

She leaned up against me and I saw my child listening intently, enthralled in the story. It gave me a wonderful feeling. It was so beautiful to see. I am glad that she is intelligent and into this stuff. I have always tried to read to her but I am not a good reader. I still have problems with some words. She understands words that I don't. She has potential to go farther in life than me. This gives me such hope for her.

If you have literacy problems, going to any literacy program can be scary at first, but it is well worth it. Sharing literacy learning with your family is even better.

Message from the President and Chair

By Annemarie Wesolowski, OLC Board of Directors



THE OLC BOARD OF DIRECTORS welcomes newly elected directors Jan Goatcher, Trudy Lothian, Angelique Angela Schinas and Michael Shaughnessy to the Board. We have once again been successful in recruiting committed

individuals with diverse backgrounds and skill sets, who have much to contribute to the work of the Board.

The Board also welcomes Lesley Brown, the Acting Executive Director for the coming year. Lesley brings to this position her wide and varied experience, which has contributed much to the growth of the adult literacy field. I look forward to working with such a skilled and dedicated group of people, and am confident that we will learn much from one another as we strive to positively impact the work of the OLC.

The results of last year's *Consultation on the OLC's Moral Ownership*, the *OLC Membership Survey*, and the AGM evaluation have provided the OLC Board and staff with valuable insight and information that will inform and support the work of the OLC as it targets the areas of priority that were set by the membership. Throughout the coming year, we look forward to reporting on the progress made in a number of these areas.

The OLC staff and Board are poised for another year of opportunities and challenges, as we prepare for and await announcements and consultations about the Labour Market Development and Partnership Agreements, the newly formed Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program, and the One Stop Employment and Training System, to mention just a few.



OLC Staff: **Front row:** Gabriela Tavaru, Patricia Brady, Lesley Brown
Back row: Sarah Bukhari, Susanne Smith, Urszula Mazur, Askin Taner

2006 Frances Lever Memorial Award Recipient

By Mary Wiggin, Chair, Frances Lever Memorial Award Committee

THE ONTARIO LITERACY COALITION is pleased to announce that Marilyn Davies of the Barrie Literacy Council was the 2006 recipient of the Frances Lever Memorial Award at the Annual General Meeting on June 23.

Marilyn has worked in literacy for 14 years. After training as a tutor in 1992 she volunteered her services as the Student/Tutor Coordinator for the newly-formed Literacy Council of South Simcoe. In 1994 she became a Laubach trainer and since then has conducted at least 40 workshops in Barrie, Alliston, Newmarket and Midland. In time she became a Supervising Trainer and has mentored other trainers, conducted numerous "train the trainer" workshops and lead workshops for supervising trainers.

In 1998 the Barrie Literacy Council hired Marilyn as the Student/Tutor Coordinator and she became their assessor after the introduction of Learning Outcomes. She has worked to develop tools to assist with assessment. At meetings of assessors within the Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network she has provided leadership, sharing samples of student work, criteria for assessment and assessment activities.

She regularly goes above and beyond the requirements of the job. In addition to working, Marilyn has volunteered as a tutor and led several weekly small groups including a writing group, a self-management group for developmentally delayed students and a workplace preparation group for Ontario Works clients.

For over five years she has assumed several roles on the Board and Committees of the Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network. She was a member of two of the working groups for the Ontario Literacy Coalition's projects on Assessment and Self-Management. Marilyn is currently reviewing books for AlphaPlus and the Golden Oak

Book Club. She has facilitated seminars at several conferences and helps with fundraising activities and outreach.

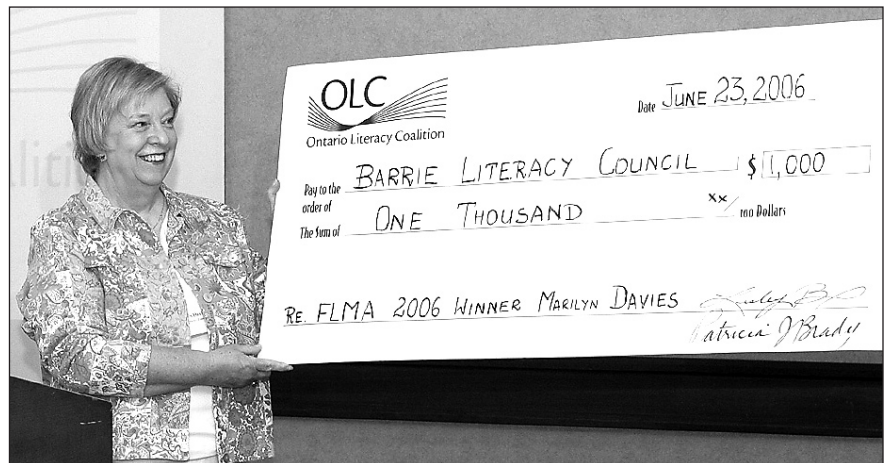
Outside the literacy field, Marilyn is a lay reader at her church as well as a member of the Church Council. She volunteers as a meal maker with the Out-of-the-Cold program and tutors a neighbourhood child who is struggling in elementary school.

Marilyn is a proud grandmother and has chosen to retire this year in order to have more time to spend with her grandchildren. However, she will continue to volunteer as a small group leader, tutor and trainer for the Barrie Literacy Council.

The OLC is delighted to honour Marilyn Davies for her contributions to literacy and to her community.

We are very grateful to all those people who submitted nominations this year and we would like to recognize the incredible people they nominated:

- ▶ Jane Jackson, North Bay Literacy Council
- ▶ Lindsay Kennedy, Literacy Project Consultant
- ▶ Derwyn Miller, Literacy Council York Simcoe
- ▶ Ann Osborne, Retired Field Consultant, MTCU
- ▶ Cheryl Turner, Action Read Community Literacy Centre



Marilyn Davies, 2006 FLMA award winner, accepts a cheque on behalf of the Barrie Literacy Council

Responding to Our Members

By Lesley Brown, Acting Executive Director

IN MAY 2006, THE OLC CARRIED OUT our yearly online survey with our members. The survey helps the OLC identify what is important to our membership, and enables us to plan how to best respond to any concerns or requests. Beginning with this issue of the newsletter, and continuing through our other communication systems such as e-bulletins and the OLC website, we will keep our members up-to-date with OLC responses to identified field needs.

If you want to see the full results from the survey, please go to our website at www.on.literacy.ca/member.htm

Priorities

The 2006 survey clearly identified the major issues concerning our membership. The top priorities identified by the survey were:

- 1) Funding – 88%
- 2) Attracting Learners to Programs – 88%
- 3) Workforce Literacy – 75%

In this newsletter we will focus on how the OLC is responding to funding issues, frameworks and accountability in the literacy community. We will look at the other top priorities in future issues.

Raising Funding Issues with Government Policy Makers and Funders

Federal Initiatives

The OLC, our regional literacy networks, sector councils, and literacy programs have responded to the recent literacy cuts by telling the public, including our MPs, what they will mean to our future ability to serve adults with literacy needs. They have done this by:

- ▶ Meeting with their local MPs, (Bill Graham, Peggy Nash, Denise Savoie, Mario Silva, etc.) to discuss how the cuts will affect national, provincial, regional and local literacy initiatives

- ▶ Talking to other MPs who have special interest in the cuts (such as Geoff Regan (Lib. – Halifax West) Official Opposition critic for Human Resources and Skills, and Tony Martin (NDP – Sault Ste. Marie) NDP critic for Human Resources)
- ▶ Sending letters and emails to MPs, especially the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, the President of the Treasury Board, and the Prime Minister
- ▶ Supporting literacy petitions
- ▶ Holding press conferences
- ▶ Speaking out via television, radio, newspapers and online news sources
- ▶ Speaking at a House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development on the status of persons with disabilities

The literacy community continues to speak out on the need to reinstate the infrastructure necessary to support adults with literacy challenges.

The OLC will be working with its Advisory Roundtable (ART) to determine a more targeted approach to highlighting the importance of literacy programming with the federal government.

To support those who would like to take part in this initiative, templates for letters to the editor and public service announcements are available on OLC's *Online Public Awareness Action Guide* at www.on.literacy.ca/pubs/aware/cover.htm Templates and samples of letters to politicians were sent out via the OLC e-bulletin. They can also be found on the MCL website at www.literacy.ca/govrel/write.htm

OLC and Our Federal Partner, Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL)

Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL), our national network, has also been keeping literacy on the national agenda. The OLC sits on the MCL Board of Directors, as does each provincial

and territorial coalition, to ensure that issues of national importance are captured at the federal level.

MCL has been instrumental in the development of the report, *Towards a Fully Literate Canada—Achieving National Goals through a Comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy*. This report, done by the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills under former minister of state for Human Resources Development Canada, Madame Bradshaw, supports the position of a long-term, stable national approach to literacy programming. For a copy of the report, go to www.nald.ca/fulltext/towards/cover.htm

MCL also seeks to get media attention for issues important to the literacy field.

A transcript of a CBC article quoting MCL Executive Director Wendy DesBrisay on the impacts of the federal funding cuts can be found at www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2006/10/04/literacy-cuts.html or, go to www.on.literacy.ca/action.htm#advocacy and scroll down to “Media Corner.”

To learn more about MCL, go to www.literacy.ca

Accountability in Funding: The Blue Ribbon Panel

OLC is monitoring the work of the Blue Ribbon Panel. This independent Panel, announced by the Treasury Board Secretariat in June 2006, is part of the action plan for Bill C-2, the Federal Accountability Act, introduced in February 2006.

As part of the Transfer Payment Policy review, the Panel will look at how grants and contributions are administered and will provide advice on how to achieve stringent accountability for these funds while still allowing for efficient fund access and management. The advice from the Panel will inform the draft Treasury Board Policy on Transfer Payments.

Responses to the Panel from the non-profit sector include many concerns similar to those experienced in the literacy field. Imagine Canada, a non-profit organization that supports non-profits, volunteering, and corporate citizenship, wrote a comprehensive report that

articulates the issues of project funding. The report can be found at www.imaginecanada.ca/Files/publicaffairs/final_blue_ribbon_panel_aug_2006.pdf

As the Panel’s recommendations are critical to the development of future federal grant and contribution policies for the non-profit sector, the OLC will continue to update the literacy field on this work.

Another good resource on funding for the non-profit sector is *Funding Matters*. Find it at the Canadian Council on Social Development’s website: www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2003/fm/

Provincial Initiatives

The OLC continues to follow-up the January 19, 2006 meeting with Minister Chris Bentley, of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), and the OLC Advisory Roundtable, with letters to the Minister that highlight the importance of adequate and consistent funding for literacy programming in Ontario.

Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills programming is currently funded by MTCU at approximately \$63 million per year. Prior to the recent federal cuts in literacy funding, new money had been negotiated through the Labour Market Partnership Agreement (LMPA). This partnership between the federal and the Ontario provincial governments was created to fill in gaps in the labour market and to assist people who are ineligible for EI benefits to acquire workplace skills. The federal government was to invest \$139 million over the next six years for literacy and basic skills and \$476.5 million for workplace skills development for a total of \$615.5 million. At the time of publication of this newsletter, the OLC does not know how the cuts will affect this agreement. We will continue to keep our membership up-to-date on this issue through our e-bulletins and our website.

ONESTEP: Staying Effective in the New Funding Environment

ONESTEP, a province-wide umbrella organization for non-profit agencies provides community-based training related to employment initiatives. It recently undertook a project called *Paths*

to *Financial Vibrancy*. This project, done in collaboration with ACTEW¹ and OAYEC², was undertaken to identify what was needed in the community-based training sector to adapt and stay effective in the new funding environment.

The OLC, CLO, GOLD³, PTP⁴, Literacy Link Niagara, and the Niagara West Employment and Learning Resources Centres were some of the literacy organizations invited to take part in this project. Through an online discussion, a workbook all participants had to complete and a two-day think tank, we were able to offer ideas and best practices for achieving financial vibrancy.

Financial vibrancy is defined as “the capacity of an organization to transition from one sustainable moment to the next. It is a set of capacities that create a ‘lens’ or a way of thinking about their work that enables these organizations to manoeuvre through instability in an opportunistic and optimistic way.” ONESTEP believes that the key to financial vibrancy rests with the Community Based Training (CBT) sector itself, with our ability to be creative, to develop new skills, and to promote and sell the value of what we do. Bold change is needed to adapt and stay effective in the new funding environment, but we can also build capacity from within. Our long-term goal is not only to increase the effectiveness of the employment and labour market service sector, but also to see organizations moving toward a more financially vibrant position.

The ONESTEP discussions focused on the following areas: governance, entrepreneurship/business development, program innovation, financial management, human resource management, results monitoring, technology use, relationship building and communication, and research utilization. An online tool will be developed to share some of these great new strategies. We will let you know when the tool is ready. To find out more about ONESTEP, go to www.onestep.on.ca

Next Steps in OLC Funding Initiatives

In the upcoming months, the OLC will continue:

1. calling for reinstatement of the federal funding cuts to literacy

2. advocating for changes to the funding structure using various methods and organizations, such as the Blue Ribbon Panel
3. providing informed advice to Minister Bentley on areas of primary importance to literacy such as LMPA and LMPA

OLC will keep members up-to-date with our ongoing activities and initiatives in this area through our regular e-bulletins and the OLC website.

References

1. ACTEW: A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women
2. OAYEC: Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres
3. GOLD: Goal: Ontario Literacy for Deaf People
4. PTP: Preparatory Training Centres

Program Updates

By Sarah Bukhari, Director, Program Development

THE OLC'S PROJECTS CONTINUE to reflect its commitment toward building a literacy community of practice. The projects we are working on right now are:

Family Literacy

The OLC's provincial working group, Action for Family Literacy (AFLO), continues to build on the work developed through two previous projects. One major activity this past year has been to deliver five regional family literacy forums. The forums were hosted by regional networks and brought together stakeholders from diverse communities of practice to discuss research practices, professional development, sustainability issues and policy development pertinent to the family literacy field. Key stakeholders from family and adult literacy, parenting and Early Year programs, libraries and school boards, social services and the health field were invited to these forums.

Participants in Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Toronto, London and Ottawa had the opportunity to come to a common understanding of family literacy in Ontario and to explore the pivotal role of parents in children's literacy development. They discussed adult literacy

programming within the contexts of family literacy and exchanged ideas, good practices and made recommendations. Forum participants talked about the barriers to family literacy programming and shared information on current partnering, bridging and content sharing activities. Research findings from AFLO's environmental scan "The State of Family Literacy in Ontario" were also presented.

Participants gave input into next steps and future directions that will be needed to move the family literacy field forward. They were also asked about the role that AFLO and the regional networks could take. A full report of the forum proceedings will be posted on the AFLO website at www.aflo.on.literacy.ca

Professional Development

A year of detailed conference pre-planning has proven invaluable to properly prepare for a large provincial conference. We will be celebrating OLC's twenty year involvement in literacy development. This pre-planning opportunity has provided time for reflection on audience expectations and recommendations from the 2004 *Literacyworks!* conference.

Workplace/Workforce

Two projects address this issue. The goal of *Strategic Partnerships for Action: A focus on workforce and workplace literacy in Ontario* is to determine how to best meet the needs of Ontario's current and future workers who have

literacy challenges. Five regional forums are planned that will offer concrete options for the future of workplace and workforce literacy in Ontario and assist in creating partnerships between business, labour and literacy organizations and other stakeholders.

The *Workforce Learning Activities Guide for Building Foundational Employment Skills* project is developing a guide whose purpose is to teach workplace processes, and interpersonal and other employability skills. This resource is being specifically designed to include activities that cover a range of LBS competency levels and is structured so that it identifies the various knowledge and skills requirements of today's workplaces.

Research

A two-year project, *First Language/ESL Literacy* examines the literacy challenges facing new Canadians in Ontario whose first language is neither English nor French. The project will give a snapshot of the realities, practices and issues of ESL Literacy in Ontario. Updates on the project can be found at www.on.literacy.ca/action

As always, the work of the OLC would not have been made possible without the invaluable support of OLC members and advisors. Thank you.

For more information on these projects and other OLC initiatives, visit the OLC website at www.on.literacy.ca or contact Sarah Bukhari at 416-963-5787 ext. 24 or by email at sarah@on.literacy.ca



Participants get actively involved at the Sudbury Family Literacy Forum.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

OLC's 20th Anniversary Conference*

June 7-9, 2007

Help us celebrate 20 years of work in the Ontario adult literacy community.

The literacy field is constantly evolving, with new innovations emerging internationally, nationally, provincially and regionally. Our conference will capture the latest trends, opportunities for literacy development, research, policy and good practice.



Literacy Takes Centre Stage

Spotlight on LEARNING!

SHARE IN OVER 50 PRESENTATIONS, WORKSHOPS AND POSTER DISPLAYS FOCUSED ON:

- ▶ **Community Connections**
- ▶ **Workforce Literacy**
- ▶ **Learning for a Lifetime**
- ▶ **Technology and Literacy**
- ▶ **Family Literacy and Learning**

The conference will be held at Victoria College, University of Toronto campus—a peaceful and secluded space in the heart of a bustling and culturally-rich university. This conference facility welcomes students, visitors, faculty, staff and alumni. For more information on the conference site, go to www.vicu.utoronto.ca.

For more information about the OLC conference, and for conference updates, go to www.on.literacy.ca



Take this opportunity to network, learn and discuss literacy issues, meet new and old friends.

SEE YOU THERE!

* Pending funding

Literacy on the Move

Literacy on the Move is published two times a year by the Ontario Literacy Coalition



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The articles in **Literacy on the Move** do not necessarily reflect the view of the Ontario Literacy Coalition but are published to share experience and stimulate interest in, and discussion on, adult basic literacy and numeracy issues.

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Find out about the OLC Employee Benefits Program

There is an Employee Benefits Program designed specifically for Ontario Literacy Coalition member agencies. Customized choices are available to you at an affordable price. Enrolling is easy! For more information contact the OLC's insurance broker, Owen & Associates, at 416-252-6116.

